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مركز المجلوعات
الغربية للفنون الشعبية

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Sincere thanks for this issue go to Rosemary Sayigh.

EDITORIAL

ORAL HISTORY IS AN ACTIVIST PROJECT:

"Concrete Details" and "the Human Factor"

In a recent essay published in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Edward Said argued that political struggles are contests of will, exercises in persuasion which the activist intellectual supports most effectively by bolstering the resolve of those waging the battle and preserving the belief that individual human acts can make a difference in the political fate of whole communities. He called this intellectual orientation "a policy of concrete details" that may reinvigorate the faith of members of despairing communities in "the human factor." Oral history is an activist project which fulfills both the method and goal described by Said. It clarifies through a detailed description of individual autobiographies that Palestinians, throughout their history of struggle, did act to make a difference in their collective fate. It does so both for the historical record and for Palestinians who have lost touch with their past, as have many Palestinians in exile today. At the same time, oral history encourages younger generations to learn relevant coping skills from the tangibly presented experiences of their elders. Moreover, it instills in them belief that through their personal interactions, as well as through their scholarly output, they can make a difference in their own fate.

Oral history comprises a systematic, painstaking documentation of the past as it was lived and experienced by the broadest number and range of people possible. Through its face-to-face method it underscores Said's point that each individual counts and has a past that demands reckoning. Thus, as shown by the projects undertaken separately by Salah Abdel-Jawad, Sonia El-Nimr, Rosemary Sayigh, and the Khalil Sakakini Center, oral history of the past five decades of Palestinian *shitah* exposes the Zionist project for what it indisputably is, in all its specificity, repeatedly enacted, immorality. Further, oral history offers to the expatriated community exactly that material needed to dramatize, as Said puts it, the wrongs committed in the name of Zionism. It makes the defeat of this most misleading project an inevitability, for it pits "concrete details" -- the horror of leaving a

child behind by mistake, the indignation at being asked to pay for a coffee cup of water at the border, the nagging inescapability of a wife's fear for her children's safety, the bending back trying to hide a pregnant belly from the eyes of a Zionist soldier, the breathes stifled under a pile of shot bodies as the shooters come to check their aim, the exasperation at not being able to find the right Mrs. Elias who promised to host you as the rain is pouring down -- and "the human factor" -- the large numbers of elders, children, and activists who are needed to carry out an oral history project; the new friendships established in the course of such a project; the hours of tape recorded; the tangibility of so many voices, so different in pitch and pitch -- oral history pits these palpable traces of human efforts and hopes against the abstract fantasy of "a land without people for a people without a land."

Fatima Mermissi has written of fantasies that they "are the important field where political and economic concepts are shaped and molded." (See "Zhor's World," in *Feminist Issues*, Spring 1982, p.4) In certain social contexts, where the present is so profoundly split from its past, memory itself becomes almost a fantasy. Moreover, memory collectively cherished and upheld in such situations can have the same formative power as fantasy. If the Zionist empty-land fantasy has in the past five decades produced a near-reality with seemingly inescapable facts on the ground, then for Palestinians to have their own memory of life before 1948, of their actions during the *hijra* period, and of life prevailing

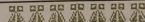
throughout the hardships of half a century in exile, for them to remember and preserve all this while living clumped in refugee camps or scattered across the world's metropolises is to hold a fantasy of no little activist value. It is the mobilization of fantasy, of commitment to the human will, of belief in people's ability to make a difference, that ARCPA has undertaken in its oral history projects.

When the Palestinians arrived at the border of Lebanon, children often had to take on the task of comforting their weary, humiliated elders. A Red-Cross worker's photograph captured one such moment and is reproduced on the front cover of this issue. The young girl shown with her hands cradling her grandfather's forehead seems even to be reciting an amulet, a magical formula of protection, to guard him from the present agony and to heal him for the future. Where is this girl now? Probably she is residing in one of Lebanon's many refugee camps, now an elder herself, and now, most likely, worn down too, not by a sudden disaster but by a half century of accumulated tragedies. If she is Imm Hussein Dahish or Fatima Hanafi, or any of the elderly women who participated in ARCPA's oral testimony collection projects, then she has seen the picture reversed: now it is the elderly woman who offers the fantastic recitations of her personal memories to invigorate the younger generation approaching her in a time of despair. And when she witnesses the young oral historians setting off, in their turn, to recite to broader audiences what they have gleaned from her generation, then the process of healing, of communal protection, will be restored.

K.S.



Children from Bat Azzah in Samal
waiting the morning plane
to Beirut during Eid Al-Fitr.



* ORAL HISTORY FOR PALESTINIANS - The Beginning of a Discipline

Interview with Rosemary Sayigh

Rosemary Sayigh is the author of two books on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Press, 1979) and *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Press, 1994), as well as numerous articles in anthropology and Arab issues. In past years, she taught oral history method and theory at the American University of Beirut. The following is an edited version of an interview held by Moa'taz El-Dijani and Jaber Soleiman with Sayigh in 1995. As it was a lengthy and replete conversation, only portions of it relevant to our oral history file have been transcribed. Further, we have organized the talk into sections centering around specific topic headings so as to facilitate reading. We apologize for this departure from true oral history method!

The Stages of My Interest in Palestinian Oral History

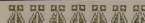
My academic history is quite mixed. I started out with an English language and literature BA from Oxford, and I came out to the Middle East without knowing Arabic language, Arabic history, or really anything about the Arab world. And probably that's one of the reasons why I was attracted to work with Palestinians of mainly rural origin using a great deal of interview material -- in other words, mainly oral history methodology. After I'd been in the Middle East for many years, I went back to university and did an MA in sociology and anthropology at the American University of Beirut (AUB). It was in 1971, after having worked for several years as a journalist -- mainly for the *Economist* (UK) -- that I took a decision to go back to university. Black September was a turning point for me; I just felt that I couldn't any longer write about the Arab world for English readers of a paper like the *Economist*, which was supporting the war in Vietnam, the Israeli establishment, and reactionary Arab regimes.

I decided to go back to university and try to understand Arab culture and Arab society. So I took courses between 1971 and 1973, two years of full-time courses at AUB. Then I did my research at Burj al-Barajneh camp. For interviews, my Palestinian colleague devised a list of informants that formed an exclusively male and older sample. I objected, and he said, "But these are the only people who know about the Palestinian question." Thus I realized that, for many people, the Palestinian experience

is a matter about which you must speak from a basis of educational knowledge rather than personal experience, as I had taken for granted. I mean to say, it was revealed to me as a sort of gap between his attitude towards the Palestinian question and my attitude: my attitude being that anybody who'd lived it could speak, would have something interesting and valuable to say about it; whereas his attitude was that no, this is a complex historical issue, which could only be delivered properly to a foreigner by senior male members of the community.

It was a very interesting moment in my research when I realized this divergence in view-points. Anyway, we altered the sample and we carried it out with a wide spectrum of people from the camp, half women and half men, of different ages. I think the youngest respondent was about 17 years old. We, also, went right across the political spectrum, including Fateh, the Popular Front (PFLP), and all the little groups, more or less. This was just before the Lebanese civil war. I did the participant-observation period, the living in Burj al-Barajneh camp, between 1973 and 1975. The Masters thesis was finished in 1975 and was called, "The Palestinian Experience Viewed as Socialization." The term "socialization" in my thesis title had two meanings. Primarily, it pointed to the post-1948 process of Palestinians learning what it meant to be stateless refugees in an Arab host country -- specifically Lebanon. However, I also saw it as pointing to my own learning of what it means to be Palestinian, a learning that still continues for me. It was Burj people who started me listening to Palestinian voices.

His attitude was that no, this is a complex historical issue, which could only be delivered properly to a foreigner by senior male members of the community.



Afterwards, I went to England, where I searched for a publisher for a book version of my thesis. That was very hard. Speak of obstacles, it was extraordinarily hard in 1975-6 to find a publisher in London for a book on the Palestinians. What happened to me first, was that a publisher called David Croom read the thesis, said "This is brilliant," and gave me a contract. I worked between the summer and Christmas on a book for this publisher, Croom-Helm, and when he saw the first chapter or two, he said, "This is absolutely useless." The contract was meaningless. It was a bitter experience.

I started out all over again looking for another publisher. Between Christmas and the summer of 1976, I wrote to about a dozen publishers. I didn't have an agent, which one usually does if you want to get published. Finally in the early summer, somebody called Roger von Zwanenberg responded from Zed Books. None of the others even answered my letters. Roger von Zwanenberg telephoned me and said, "I'd like to meet." I remember bicycling over to this tiny little office, and he, himself, was painting the walls. Zed Press was going to specialize in the Third World, mainly Africa, and they were interested in the Palestine problem. They read the thesis and liked it but said, "You've got to change everything -- complete rewriting!" I accepted that.

This was the summer of the tragedy of Tel al-Za'atar. The war was over more or less, and I came back to Lebanon and started collecting more material for the book because the interviews that I had done for the thesis were insufficient. I did nearly a year more of interviewing. Zed books was very supportive; everything I sent them they replied to instantly with comments and criticisms. The book, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, was published in 1979, right after Sadat had gone to Jerusalem, and everything had started to go downhill.

Between the time the book came out in 1979 and the Israeli invasion in 1982, I got a small grant from the Arab Studies Institute in Boston. I started researching the General Union of Palestinian Arab Women and the broader movement, with the aim of exploring the outreach of movement activities to the mass of women in camps. I would meet with leaders and cadres. The executive committee at that time was in Beirut as was much of the leadership. I would go to conferences and visit the camps. I got to know Rashadiyyeh and Ain el-Helweh. Before, the

ROSEMARY SAYIGH

PALESTINIANS

From Peasants to Revolutionaries

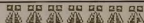


"Rosemary Sayigh's classic allows Palestinians to speak for themselves, and... they speak more clearly and powerfully than outsiders, however perceptive these may be."

MIDDLE EAST INTERNATIONAL

only camps I knew really well were Dbeyeh Camp, where some relations of Yusuf, my husband, were, and Burj al-Barajneh, where I did my fieldwork. After the book came out, I started visiting other camps.

During that period there were a many cultural initiatives -- revivals of *dabkeh*, dancing, singing, festivals, exhibitions. However, despite all this interest in cultural activity, the idea of recording the people's history was for some reason blocked. At a time when, you would think, it would have been easy to do it, there was no real movement to record popular culture and popular history. I wasn't sufficiently into the movement to know why it was blocked. The intellectuals were present and capable, but maybe an effort to record the popular history and culture just wasn't favored by the leadership. Or maybe it was because everyone was in a *tanzim* [trans.: organization]: this was really the only



Looking back, we can see that the national leadership of that period had little interest in the potentiality of cultural work for national and social liberation.

framework in which people worked in those days. I'm not in a position to give an analysis. I only had the experience of being close to the movement, of wanting to work in this field, and of not finding a group with which I could work. I felt very isolated. Looking back, we can see that the national leadership of that period had little interest in the potentiality of cultural work for national and social liberation.

The women leaders and cadres I met with always gave me a warm welcome, but I sensed they weren't enthusiastic about my research. Maybe they weren't convinced that research could help the national struggle, or the aims of their *tanzim*. I was only just starting out on the Arab Institute study when the 1982 invasion began. In fact, I was in Nahr al-Bared camp (North Lebanon) when the war started, and saw the bodies of students from Nahr killed in a school bus being brought home in Red Crescent ambulances for burial.

As to history, there was little interest at that time in the history of the national women's movement. Resistance women tended to dismiss the pre-1948 movement as 'charitable' or 'pre-political'. Even the Palestinian research and publishing institutes — there were two in Beirut at that time — didn't encourage research about Palestinian society, history or culture. They were more interested in international and regional politics. Up to 1982, almost the only social study they published was Hani Mandus's work.⁴ A proposal I made to the Institute for Palestine Studies in 1980/1 to record older women's recollections of the pre-1948 women's movement was turned down. Since then, most of that generation have died. In the end, I had to abandon the Arab Studies Institute project. After the 1982 invasion, it wasn't possible to continue researching the politicization of women in

the camps! People were at that time extremely suspicious and reserved. So for a while, I resumed journalism, writing mainly for *Middle East International*, covering the invasion and later 'Ain el-Helweh under Israeli occupation. Then I registered for a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology at Hull University in England so as to study with the distinguished scholar Talal Asad in their external program. Soon after the end of the 1982 war, I began field research in Shateela Camp. The eventual title of the doctoral thesis, which I submitted in 1993, was 'Palestinian Camp Women's Narratives of Exile: Self, Gender, and National Crisis.'

During the sieges of Shateela Camp (the 'Battle of the Camps'), I started, also, to record people's experiences of the sieges. Between 1985 and 1987, the camp was practically destroyed. For example, the house of the people with whom I was closest was completely ruined, and they had to move to Wadi Zeinich, near Sidon. A lot of people started to live outside the camp, in refugee centers. Some people were still inside, but with the camp besieged, it became quite difficult to go in. Still, I continued visiting Shateela, even after the third siege when the Syrians established a checkpoint outside. I kept going back and recording every siege as it happened because I felt this was national history which somebody needed to record: since I was there with a tape recorder, I did it. I stopped doing my own research at that point and concentrated on the sieges. In the end, I didn't do just the history of the sieges. I went back and got older people's recollections of the founding of the camps and the very first days in the 1950s. It turned into a history of the Palestinians in Lebanon, told through the memories of the people in a single camp, Shateela. The book was finally

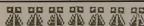
Even the Palestinian research and publishing institutes didn't encourage research about Palestinian society, history or culture. They were more interested in international and regional politics.

published in 1994, and I titled it *Too Many Enemies*.

As to my dissertation, it was finally based upon recordings with women from Shateela camp, in the form of more or less free life stories. The oldest narrator was ninety, and the youngest was twenty-five. Some of the women needed no prompting at all; they just talked, particularly the younger ones. With most of them I had certain themes and questions, so the results could be called 'conversational interviews.' My method was to encourage them to be autonomous; this is why I used questions as little as possible. When they said, 'Where shall I begin?' I used to say things like 'Wherever you want to,' or sometimes I said, 'What's your earliest memory?' I wanted them to begin wherever they wanted to begin. This is one of the values of non-structured life-story recording: people begin at a moment which has emotional importance for them — something you lose irrevocably if you force a structured format upon their narrating.

My Interest in Researching the Topic of Women

It always starts with some personal experience or perception, something in one's own life. I've long been very impressed with the strength of Palestinian — and I must say of all Arab — women. Strength in all fields; I don't just mean physical, although there is an element of physical strength, especially in the camps. Rather, I mean, a sort of ability to cope with things which I, as a Western woman, would find very difficult to cope with. I'm just speaking of my first impressions from when I used to go and visit Dbeyeh camp, when I was quite young and went there for family visits. I would see women with eight children around them and no husbands (they would be off in the Gulf earning money and return just once every two years). I was amazed by the difficulties of their life and by how that didn't ever get them down. They would never lose control. They would always be able to manage with these extraordinary difficulties. This was my first encounter with camp Palestinians. I started thinking, 'How can these women be so strong? Their lives are so terrible!' — from my point of view, based on how I liked to live. All these kids, shouting, noise, work in the house, and no entertainment at all. Day after day, without a cinema or a book or a holiday: all the things that as a middle-class Englishwoman, I thought were the basis of life, they didn't have. Yet they were full of vitality.



ROSEMARY SAYIGH

TOO MANY ENEMIES

The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon

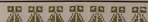


BY THE AUTHOR OF THE CLASSIC
Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries

That was how it started. After AUB, I got more interested in the Palestinian women's movement. Over the years, I began collecting testimonies from women about their lives before the *nakbeh*. Whenever I got the chance, I recorded with women from the Arab Palestinian Women's Union: Wadia Kharatibi, Umm Samir Khoury, Matil Moughannem, and Zulaykha al-Shehawi in Jerusalem. I made a trip to the West Bank in May, 1980, just after the famous sit-in they had at the Orthodox hospital. I was so impressed with Zulaykha, who'd been a founder of one of the first political women's unions.

I remember trying to meet Evelyn Homsi from Jaffa. She was one of the historic leaders from Jaffa, who had come to Lebanon, set up a branch of the Union here, and worked all through the 50s and 60s helping women with embroidery — a wonderful woman. I remember phoning her in about 1980-1 for an appointment. She said, 'I'd love to meet you,

⁴ Al-Arabi wa al-Umm al-Filastiniyya: balad maydan' al-mukhawwat. Tal al-Za'atar. Trans. Work and Women in Palestine's Camps: Fieldwork on the Tal al-Za'atar Camp (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1974). Other exceptions were Nafiz Nassar's oral history of the 1948 war in Galilee (*The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee*, Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1978) and Ghazi Khalil's *Alman' al-Filastiniyya wa al-thawra* (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1977).



* ORAL HISTORY: CONTINUOUS, PERMANENT CONNECTION

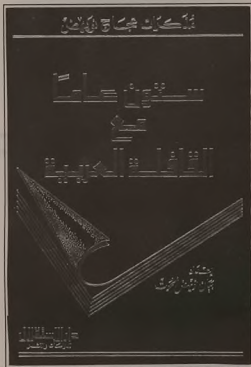
Interview with Bayan al-Hout

Bayan al-Hout is a Palestinian-Lebanese political scientist and historian residing in Beirut. She teaches courses on political science and, particularly, the Palestinian issue in the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the Lebanese University. She is the author of numerous books, including *The Leadership and Political Institutions in Palestine, 1917-1948* (Al-Qiyadat wa al-mu'assasat al-siyasiya fi Filastin, 1917-1948, Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1981), *The Freedom Fighter Sheikh Azzedine al-Qassam in the History of Palestine* (Al-Shaykh al-mujahid 'Azzidin al-Qassam fi tarikh Filastin, Beirut: Dar al-Istiqal, 1987), *Palestine: The Cause, the People, the Civilization: Political history from the Canaanite period to the twentieth century*, 1917 (Filastin: al-Qadiya, al-Shu'ab, wa-al-Hadara: al-tarikh al-siyasiya min 'ahd al-kanani hata al-qarn al-ashrin, 1917, Beirut: Dar al-Istiqal, 1991), and *Development of the Lebanese Constitutional and Political System, 1920-1995* (Tatawwur al-nizam al-dusturi wa-al-siyasi al-lubani, 1920-1995, Beirut: Lebanese University, 1996), as well as innumerable articles. Al-Hout is currently editing and annotating a collection of oral history testimonies collected by her father, the historian Ajaj al-Nuwahid, in the 1950s, from leading members of the Arab Movement about their recollections of the Greater Arab Revolt. The following interview was submitted to al-Hout in written form.

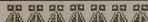
Q: In your capacity as an historian, how and when did your interest in Palestinian oral history begin? And to what extent did you rely on its technique in preparing your doctoral dissertation, "Leadership and Political Institutions in Palestine, 1917-1948"?

A: I cannot remember exactly when my interest in oral history began. The truth is that I was raised in a family atmosphere where the conversation was always about memories of the past, of Palestine or of the recent Arab past. It was like our daily bread, in that my father was one of the vanguard historians, and his visitors were always either his peers or those who came to pose questions. The result was a permanent obsession I've had since early childhood, that is the love of listening. When I grew older, I used to fear greatly for the loss of all the heritage preserved in the minds of those forerunners, and I was one of the people who asked, "What's to be done?"

As far as my doctorate is concerned, oral history was a principle method and indispensable resource for me, but it was not the only one. The doctoral thesis was not based on oral history alone but rather on a variety of sources, documents, and references that were available in the seventies. Indeed, in the book's introduction I indicated the importance of the interviews. I held with tens of men from the Palestinian national movement, and there were those I met with numerous times. I explained also that the importance of these interviews for the research and writing of the thesis far exceeded mention of them in the footnotes. This is to say that their importance was not just in gleaning information but also in



guiding me to sources and references other than manuscripts or written diaries or old journals. In short, those who knew the period well were good references for checking information about which I had doubts. So I would ask them about it and be



Continuous talking with them would transport me to the milieu of the mandate period, not just psychologically but also mentally.

enlightened by their opinions. In addition to that, continuous talking with them would transport me to the milieu of the mandate period, not just psychologically but also mentally.

Q: What is the importance of oral history for Palestine and Palestinians in the current period, when efforts are being made to erase the collective memory? And what is your estimation of the efforts made by Palestinians in this field up to now?

A: Oral history is important to all peoples, so would you not say that it is even more important to a people subject to concrete attempts to obliterate its collective as well as individual memory? Today, it is said to this people, "You must forget your past!" But does this people in reality own anything other than its past? The confiscation of the land and the expulsion of the people were great tragedies, but the people were united in their faith, their struggle, their revolution, and their belief in liberation. Today, the confiscation of this unity of this people and the unity of their struggle is taking place gradually. What is required of oral history now is not just a history of the near past but also of the present. For the Palestinian, wherever he or she may be, is in most palpable need of knowing what is happening to all the members of his or her people everywhere. Thus the first duty given to oral history of the past and present is that it be provide a connecting link. Without continuous, permanent connection, how can the Palestinian people confront the new conspiracy of expulsion and exile? In the past, exile was from the homeland, and there was alienation from the homeland even within the homeland. But today, alienation includes the exile of the self from its owner, i.e. self-alienation. The urgent question is: How can we remain a people? And how can we remain a united, fighting people?

As to the efforts already made in the field of oral history, it would be wrong to apply a general judgment because a large portion of them were individual or even collective but limited to a single university. To my knowledge, there has not been to this day, any effort exerted to lay the foundations of a pioneer institution devoted to the field of oral history. I recall

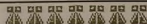
clearly that before the invasion of 1982, I and a number of comrades tried our hardest to convince leading academic institutions, any of one of which would have been able to start collecting oral history testimonies, even if only from certain camps or in a limited manner. However, our attempts were failed. As for the situation in the occupied homeland, it is obvious that consciousness there surpassed that of ours abroad, for there is more than one project underway. However, to this day, "the project" or "the mother project" does not yet exist in any one city or place, that project which if in existence would make it possible for Palestinian associations in other cities or places to follow its steps and would interweave the efforts of all into a single integrated foundation.

Q: We would like for you to talk about a specific research project you carried out in the field of oral history. To what extent was this method relied upon in the memoirs you edited of your father, the historian, author, and fighter, 'Ajaj Nuwayhid?

A: Oral history for me is not merely a method for a certain book, but, rather, it is a principle resource to which I always return when the need arises. Thus, it is rare that I undertake any research project or study of the twentieth-century without oral history providing some references and having a basic presence. I respect oral history and consider it a main source, on par with written documents, encyclopedias, and diaries. In addition to this, I undertook two projects that were based primarily on interviews, the first involved interviewing more than twenty officials and leaders of the Palestinian revolution. These interviews took place in the early seventies. The second project was on the extremely tragic events in Sabra and Shateela during September 1982. I held interviews with relatives of victims, witnesses, civil defense forces and the like, and my work lasted throughout the entire year after the massacres, achieving a total of more than 130 interviews. I believe that the importance of these interviews grew out of the desire of people to talk despite all the pressures and threats they faced in 1983.

It is one of my hopes to fulfill my promise to write about those three bloody days, and soon, god

Today, it is said to this people, "You must forget your past!" But does this people in reality own anything other than its past?



There are many who have a conscience, but few of them have attained all the necessary skills to do oral history.

willings. As for my father's memoirs, they are entirely based upon oral history, for my father, may he rest in peace, dictated his memoirs to me in the spring of 1981. He filled twenty-five cassettes with his life-story from his childhood in Ras al-Metn, Lebanon, through the nearly thirty years of his struggle in Palestine, up to 1948, known as "the year of destruction." For reasons I cannot really understand, he refused to talk about any subsequent period, even about his writings and books. That is what forced me to go back to his personal papers in order to complete the biography up to the date of his death in 1982. So the final book comprises fifteen chapters, twelve of which are based on the cassettes and the final three of which I prepared from on private papers.

Q: Did you know that the Zionist movement has set about the creation of an archive of oral history for what is known as "the Jewish holocaust" in order to gain increased world sympathy for Jews and turn that into support for their claims in the Promised Land? At the time that the Palestinian "Diaspora" is being consolidated, what is the importance of creating an archive of the Palestinian exile so that we might gain support for the right of our people to return to their homeland? How should this be done and who is responsible for doing this?

A: I have a comment to make about the use of the phrase "has set about," which implies that this is something upon which the Zionist movement has only recently embarked. The fact is that the recording of oral history about the holocaust has been

going on for tens of years, indeed since the end of the second world war. But the truly new thing, as far as I know, is the recording of the memoirs of holocaust survivors on video tape. In all three cases, that is, taking down conversations, writing them up by hand, or recording them on audio or video cassettes, these are only means. What's more important is that the huge Zionist machine which relies upon these propagandist means is capable of reminding the world daily of what happened in the Nazi camps.

The creation of an archive for the Palestinian exile? Who would be the agency responsible for that? Before deciding who is to be responsible, let us recall that the main agency that should overlook such a project, is an agency that no longer cares about the fate of all the people in exile, so do you think it would care about their memories, pains, and hopes? As we mentioned earlier, the future tragedies will be a new dispersal of the people, a new separation of those inside from those outside, and between the Arabs in Israel and those in the West Bank and Gaza. The people in exile are refugees without an identity. When you ask, who undertakes this oral history project, I simply have no answer, except to outline the following qualifications. There are two primary qualifications that must be possessed by whomever wants to undertake such a project: the first is a conscience and the second is knowledge. There are many who have a conscience, but few of them have attained all the necessary skills to do oral history. So, to those who have the conscience and the skills, the question must be directed.



* *The Tale of the Ful-Seller's Daughter*

Once upon a time, oh listeners -- pray to the memory of the prophet, may praises and blessings be upon him -- there once was a king's son and a ful-seller's* daughter. This king's son would gaze at the ful-seller's daughter everyday as she climbed up to the rooftop carrying the watering-can and went about watering the plants, this rosebush, that jasmine shrub. He would say, "Oh ful-seller's daughter, has your father's business gotten better or not?" And she would reply, "It's neither gotten better nor gotten better, and he hasn't made any close friends. What do you want from me, oh son of a clog's edge?" And he'd say to her, "Fine, never mind."

The king's son went and put on wretched clothes, raggedy clothes, and on his head he put a tray of apples and set out, calling loudly, "Tray of apples, tray of apples for the young ladies". The ful-seller's daughter called to him, "Come over here, you apple-seller." She didn't realize it was the king's son. He looked up, and she asked him, "How much for that tray of apples?" He said, "I'm not selling for money; I'm selling for a kiss." She said, "No." "No?" he said, "As you like," and he started off with the apple tray. She said, "Ohh, there's no one here; alright, come." He came up to her, took her and cornered her behind the door, and kissed her three times. Then he gave her the apple tray and went on his way, just picked himself up and left.

The next day, in the morning -- good-morning to everyone -- the king's son gazed up at the ful-seller's daughter. He said to her, "Oh ful-seller's daughter, has your father's business gotten better or not?" She replied, "It's neither gotten better nor better, and he hasn't made any close friends. So what do you want from me, oh son of a clog's edge?" He said to her, "Fine. Behind the door I cornered you, and three kisses I kissed you. Did you win or did I?" She exclaimed, "Agghh, that was you?" "Me," he fine. "Alright," she said. Then she went to her father and told him, "Look here, smear me with paint, black like a slave, from my head to my toes, and go sell me in the hawkers' market to the king's son." Her father said to her, "Alright." So he painted her and took her down to the square and began to call out, "This slave-girl's for seven hundred. Seven hundred. Seven hundred." The king's son came. He announced, "I'm the buyer." "Okay, here you go," said the ful-seller. He took from him the seven hundred and went on his way.

The ful-seller's daughter set off walking with the king's son. Suddenly they came upon a herd of sheep grazing. She asked, "Master, master, you buy sheep?" He said to her, "Okay," and bought seven head of sheep. She

* A ful-seller is a tradesman who sells a dish of baked beans, a popular meal for the urban lower-class.

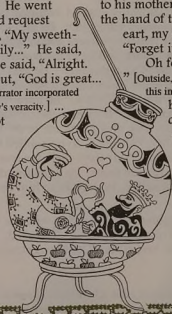
walked a little further and saw people sitting about, slaughtering sheep. She asked, "Master, master, we slaughter sheep?" He said, "No, we don't want to slaughter the sheep." She said to him, "Me slaughter sheep." She brought the seven sheep and made him slaughter them.

No sooner did they walk on, then they came upon drumming and piping in the valley. The noise was none other than a group of Kurds...or gypsies, God knows. The ful-seller's daughter said to the king's son, "Master, master, we watch." He replied, "Us! I'm the king's son; how could I watch?" She said, "Come on, it's no problem; let's watch; let's see." They turned him toward the crowd in spite of himself and kept pushing at him until she got him dancing. No sooner did she get him all dancing, then she picked herself up and fled. She ditched him.

When the ful-seller's daughter got to her house, she went to the lavatory and washed and bathed herself and dressed in new clothes. Then she went up to the rooftop. The king's son arrived. He called to her, "Oh ful-seller's daughter, is your father's business better or not?" She said to him, "Not better nor butter, and he's made no good friends. So what do you want from me, you son of a clog's edge?" He replied, "Well! Behind the door I cornered you, and three kisses I kissed you, so did you win or did I?" She said, "Seven hundred I made you spend, and seven head of sheep I made you slaughter, and among the gypsies I made you dance, so did you win or did I?" He exclaimed, "Aaggh, that was you?" "Me," she replied. He said, "Fine."

What should he do? He went you have to go and request for me." She said, "My sweetest-son, the son of a good family..." He said, daughter, I want her." She said, "Alright. The muezzin was calling out, "God is great... prayer for the evening, and the narrator incorporated himself were testifying to the story's veracity. [...] up, the poor thing, and got took a tray full of jewels

to his mother and said to her, "Listen, the hand of the ful-seller's daughter eat, my dear, you are the king's "Forget it. The ful-seller's Oh for heaven's sake..." As [Outside, the muezzin was calling the this into her tale, as if to say that God his mother picked herself dressed in her scarf and and gold.



The king's wife said to the ful-seller's wife, "I've come to propose, to request your daughter's hand for my son." The girl's mother said to her, "Yeeeh!

How can I give the ful-seller's daughter to the king's son?" The boy's mother said to her, "He wants her. What should I do? He wants her..." The ful-seller's wife was confused; what should she get before her guest? She was confused. What should she bring her...? Everything she had. She brought (may God keep you above such a fate) this cauldron that was all soot and set it down and told her, "Sit." (And see, the king's wife, how dirty her white scarf got, black like tar.) The ful-seller's wife said, "Listen, my daughter, you'll have to bring her into your house during the dark. I don't want anyone to see her. I don't want anyone to notice her." The king's wife said to her, "Absolutely. On such-a-day we want her." The girl's mother replied, "Agreed."

The ful-seller's daughter went to the bridal shop. She said to the owner, "See my figure, see my length, see my clothes, see my outfit...I want you to make me a bridal trousseau just like this." He said to her, "Most gladly." (They used to be very clever. He made her a complete bridal trousseau and all.)

Just before they brought the groom, the ful-seller's daughter crawled into a closet and hid herself and tied the head of the... (the one she'd had made) with a string. He came, the king's son that is, and saw her standing, this bride! He said to her, "So, oh ful-seller's daughter, did your father's business get better or not?" All the bride could do was nod her head. He continued, "Behind the door I cornered you, and three kisses I kissed you. Did you win or did I?" She nods with her head like this. "Seven hundred you made me spend, and seven head of sheep you made me slaughter..." She nods her head so. "And among the gypsies you made me dance..." She nods her head so. "And you going to keep this up for long, huh?" He grabbed his sword and cut off her head. No sooner had he cut off her head, then a pearl bead fell on his. He said to her, "Aaggh, you're all sweetness from the first to the last, you little scamp!" Just then, the ful-seller's daughter jumped out of the closet.

And they lived happily ever after, in good health and prosperity... may God give long life to the listeners.

Narrator: Hassan Hassan 'Al
Provenance: Majd al-Krum
Current Residence: Beirut

Recorded by: Suhair al-Azm
Date of Recording: November, 1995
Translator: Kirsten Scheid Jares

* There is a pun in this story which is crucial to its resolution. Unfortunately, calling attention to it will necessarily diminish the reader's pleasure in the text, but this is the cost of translation. The pun is upon the bride's request for a bridal trousseau. The word 'rouce' means both bride and puppet in Palestinian dialect (as it does also in Egyptian dialect). Thus, the man of the bridal shop makes for the girl a complete replica of her, herself, and not just a set of clothes for her to wear. The reader's discovery of this second meaning in the text doesn't occur, in Arabic, until the story's end, thus the cleverness of the ful-seller's language. The hearer of the tale in Arabic is briefly put - literally, by this double-entendre, - in the position of the duped prince, for if the listener thinks that on the prince's bride - so greatly moved out of her own social class, the ful-seller's daughter will act the part of a personality-less puppet, he/she is certainly mistaken. It is this ambivalence about the bride's role that the narrator puts to rest with the story's fulfllment conclusion.

**HOW TO UNDERTAKE AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
PANOS'S GUIDELINES FOR ORAL TESTIMONY COLLECTION***

These guidelines cover the process of preparation, training, interviewing, transcription, and translation of oral testimonies. They are for general guidance only, to clarify the role of any participating organization and local project coordinator.

INTRODUCTION:

The subject area covered under most projects is large. We need to restrict the scope of each interview to a limited number of topics and to plan questions in some detail, in order to keep interviews to an acceptable length and to elicit detailed and personal responses from the interviewees. At the same time, we must be flexible and ready to respond to the unpredictable.

The interviewer must strike a balance between following the prepared questions and topics, and allowing someone who wants to talk about something different to do so – as long as it is relevant to the subject.

From the point of view of the project as a whole, we have to find a balance between:

- simply listening to what concerns the interviewees
- relying on the local partners, with specialist advice, to identify the topics of particular concern to their organization, country or region
- the final need to create a balanced book covering a spread of issues.

To achieve this balance, consultation is essential at the planning stage between the project coordinator and the local coordinator/organization. The local organization also needs to think about the uses they and the participating community wish to make of the testimonies (beyond feeding them into a book), such as developing literacy materials, recording changing agricultural and social practices, building up a small archive of community history and/or indigenous knowledge.

SECTION 1 PROPOSED PROCESS:

- The research organization appoints a project coordinator.
(See Section 2 for a more detailed description of the role of the coordinator.) They should do some initial research into the subject of the project, finding out what local organizations have already done work in this area. This may help identify:
 - themes and topics to be explored and,
 - individuals or organizations who can advise on the drawing up of the questions and comment on or review the final results.
- The research organization suggests some areas of importance from its point of view, based on its knowledge of the issues and on local expertise and existing research.
- Responses are made by interested parties on this initial proposal and priorities for the research set.
- The project coordinator begins to identify interviewees, and individuals, groups, and communities to approach for interviews, and to draw up a rough interview plan/questionnaire. Interviewers are selected.
- The interview plan/questionnaire will be finalized in consultation with interested parties, the research organization, and the selected interviewers, with the aid of a specialist advisor if

appropriate, during the training workshop. It will outline the principal and secondary topics to be addressed in the interviews with each individual or group. Depending on the number of topics to be covered and the number of interviews to be conducted, the same basic questionnaire might be followed for all interviews or different areas/groups might highlight different aspects/themes. (The latter is the more likely option.)

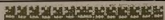
- The training will emphasize that during each interview, the interviewer must use initiative and judgment, as mentioned above, in finding a balance between responding to each individual interviewee's interests, and pursuing the planned topic.

SECTION 2 ROLE OF LOCAL COORDINATOR:

- Prior to the workshop, to find out what local organizations have already worked with/researched the subjects concerned, and to identify individuals/organizations who can help with the development of the questionnaire and review the final interviews for balance and accuracy, and to provide social, cultural, environmental, political, and historical background as appropriate.
- To supervise the selection of the interviewers (see Section 3).
- To plan the training workshop.
- To create, with advice from interested parties, the draft questionnaire and to draw up a provisional budget and timetable for the work.
- To make an initial selection of the groups of people to be interviewed.
- After the workshop, to finalize the selection of the interviewees, supervise the interviewing sessions, and depending on the experience of the interviewers, to double-check the quality of the first interviews in the field.
- To review all completed interviews, supplying any necessary background information, for eventual future uses.
- To supervise the follow-up activities and further use of the interviews.

SECTION 3 INTERVIEWERS:

- Interviewers should be people you know, whom you can trust to take the initiative in following up interesting points, and to be sensitive in handling difficult subjects. If you can leave the conduct of the interviews as much as possible to them, they will feel more sense of purpose and ownership.
- As a general rule, interviewers should be of the same sex as the interviewees.
- The interviewers themselves must be interested in the subject of research and must have a good understanding of it, so that they can see the significance of what is being said, respond to it, and find their own questions to ask in order to elicit further information.
- The interviewers should speak the language of the interviewees.
- The most successful interviewers have proved to be those educated to a degree level; they can grasp the topic and the significance of the information gathered, and can transcribe interviews quickly. Project workers can make good interviewers, as can anyone with experience listening to or interviewing people – good communication skills are vital.
- Enthusiasm is very important, since interviewing is quite arduous, may involve travel, and may require patience to deal with frustrating delays and difficult conditions. Recent graduates are more likely to have the ideal combination of education and enthusiasm than



more experienced professional people.

- 7 - Make sure the interviewers realize that they will have to transcribe, and in some cases translate, the interviews they conduct. This is a time-consuming task, but it has to be done by the interviewers themselves.

SECTION 4 INTERVIEWEES:

The project coordinator will be responsible for visiting the areas where interviewing will take place, explaining the project to local community leaders, etc. as necessary, identifying possible interviewees (following some discussion with potential interviewers), discussing the project with them and getting their agreement to be interviewed, and arranging the timetable and logistics. It can be particularly difficult for women to set aside time without interruptions to be interviewed, so the most convenient times for them should be established.

Most interviews will be with individuals, but group interviews are also useful: a group sometimes gives a speaker confidence or generates a more lively and original discussion. It is also useful to hear a consensus view of particular experiences or issues. Groups may set their own agenda for discussion, raising topics of most interest to them as a group – this can provide valuable insight in itself. Such sessions can also highlight discrepancies between individual and collective views of the same event/experience.

- 1 - Interviewees should come from a range of ages, occupations, social backgrounds, and experiences.
- 2 - Most interviewees should be "ordinary" people who can speak about their own experiences, perceptions, concerns. But it can be useful to include people who are organizers or have extension responsibilities, or represent organizations, such as informal or organized women's groups, or community organizations. These informants will be able to talk more broadly about a community's situation and needs, the changes which may have taken place, and how people are trying to address these. This kind of interview is important because part of resulting book's audience will be NGOs and development workers, who will be interested in interventions that are being made. Where changing social, environmental, and economic conditions are the focus of a study, it will be important to include those who perform some of a community's traditional functions, for example, local healer, herbalist, religious leader, etc.
- 3 - Individuals you know through your work offer two advantages:
 - a. they will already have a degree of confidence in your organization and therefore in your interviewer, and so rapport will be easier to build up, and
 - b. you may be able to select people who you know can talk fluently, have interesting things to say, and may positively enjoy being interviewed. You may also choose people who are less "easy" to interview but whose experiences and perspectives are particularly illuminating.
- 4 - It is crucial that interviewees are completely clear about the objectives of the project, the use of their material, and that any requests for anonymity will be respected.
- 5 - Ideally, if interviewees are willing, it is a good idea to have quality black and white photographs of some individuals. Again, one needs to be sensitive to any difficulties with this. The project coordinator may need to discuss this with interviewees.
- 6 - The target number of interviews to be collected will vary from project to project. Since some of the interviews will inevitably be less successful or interesting than others, the research organization should plan to collect slightly more than the agreed amount, so that the best of these can be selected for eventual publication or other use.

SECTION 5 TRAINING:

Ideally, training should be spread over 4-5 days.

Day 1) Workshop session for the interviewers, project coordinator, trainers, and, if appropriate, specialist advisor.

- a. Discuss the project so that the interviewers understand what the purpose of the interviews is.
- b. Discuss the topics to be explored, to ensure that interviewers understand them and have sufficient background knowledge of the issue. Modify topics and/or add topics in light of the interviewers' comments.
- c. Discuss the outline questions one at a time, to make sure they are understood. If the interviewers ask each other the questions in the language in which they will be interviewing, it may raise issues of translation, or of cultural appropriateness, which should be resolved now. This will also be an appropriate time for them to comment on the questions, to refine or improve them.
- d. Discuss the conduct of the interviews, problems and issues that may arise. In particular, the difficulties to be expected in interviewing certain groups should be considered: women, for example, are sometimes not accustomed to speaking freely or having their opinion sought, or have not been encouraged to reflect critically on their lives and situations, and so may respond rather briefly to questions.
- e. Decide what opening lines are appropriate, polite formulae for establishing a proper atmosphere for interviews with different people. Ensure that the interviewers know the proper greetings, etc. for the various interviewees.
- f. Discuss the role of the prepared questions, so that interviewers understand that they do not have to follow these strictly but should use their own judgment about what issues to follow and what to ignore. Ideally, they should commit the questions to memory, and only refer to the outline of absolutely necessary. Emphasize that difficult questions do not have to be answered: if a respondent is unwilling to talk about something, s/he should be encouraged but not forced.
- g. Familiarize interviewers with the recording equipment.

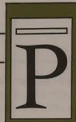
Days 2 and 3) Pilot interviews in the field. Each trainee interviewer will conduct one (or more) practice interviews. If numbers permit, interviewers could work in pairs, so that each has a chance to observe as well as conduct an interview. Interviewers will immediately transcribe the interviews.

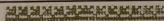
Day 4) Reporting back on the pilot interviews. The texts of the pilot interviews will be read and discussed with the coordinators and the other interviewers. The interviewers will exchange experiences, comment on each other's interviews, and discuss difficulties encountered. Points where different questions could have been asked or more information sought will be identified and discussed. Interviewers will also listen to each other's tapes and comment on the transcription. Outline questionnaires may be revised or amended in light of this session.

Final discussion should take place on the location and range of the interviewees, ensuring as representative a spread as possible of the communities concerned.

SECTION 6 EQUIPMENT:

All interviews should be tape-recorded. What type of equipment you use depends on what you wish to use the tapes for: if they might be broadcast, or used as tapes in any educational or training forum, you should use professional-quality equipment with a separate microphone. The interviewers





will need some training in using this properly. If the tapes are to be transcribed and used in written form only, then a recorder with a built-in microphone is sufficient. It does not seem to make much of a difference to the interviewee which type of equipment is used.

Tape recorders should be of the type which can both record and play back. This is important in order to a) demonstrate the tape recorder to the interviewee, and b) facilitate transcription. If the recorders also have a tape counter, so much the better, but small ones don't.

You will want to decide at an early stage in your planning what use you wish to make of your tapes, so that you can budget accordingly.

SECTION 7 FIELD COLLECTION:

Allow for an average of two interviews per day for each interviewer – it is exhausting work, and needs alertness and enthusiasm. Each interview will last between 45 minutes and two hours, but introductions, rapport building, finding a suitable location, etc. will add to the time needed. If an interviewee still has a lot to say after two hours, then a second interview should be arranged. More than two hours at a time is too long and tiring for both interviewee and interviewer.

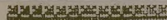
Three consecutive days of interviewing is probably as much as one interviewer can do at a time without becoming tired. On the other hand, best results are obtained when the interviewer can devote a block of time to the interviews, rather than having to fit them in around other work.

THE INTERVIEW:

- 1- The interviewer should know the topics/questions by heart before the interview begins, so that during the interview s/he does not have to keep referring to a paper, something which can be distracting.
- 2- On arrival, after introduction, choose a site for the interview. Women in particular tend to prefer to be interviewed in their homes, but this can mean they are frequently distracted by children, visitors, or chores. Choose a place which is quiet enough for recording.
- 3- The interviewer must introduce his/herself, explain the project, and make sure that the interviewee understands what use is to be made of the interview.
- 4- Demonstrate the tape recorder, and let the interviewee hear the sound of the interviewer's voice and his/her own.
- 5- During the interview, it may be best not to take notes: this can distract and break the flow of talk, and where the respondent is illiterate, it can emphasize the social or power gap between interviewer and interviewee. A summary sheet, containing basic information about the interview (name of respondent, age, location, occupation, etc.) and notes on the main points of the conversation, non-verbal expressions and descriptions, could be immediately made after the interview, as an aide-memoire and back-up to the tapes.
- 6- The interviewer must be alert for references which may not be clear to someone unfamiliar with the region, such as place names, dates, ages, references to historical events, persons, or local customs. They should ask the interviewee to explain these before the interview is over, or be prepared to go back later to seek clarification.

SECTION 9 TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION:

If an interview is likely to be used in its original language, for example as literacy/teaching materials or for a community history/education project, it should be transcribed in that language, and an English translation be prepared as necessary subsequently from the written text. If no such use is



planned, it can be decided that the interviewer can translate directly from the tape recording into English – but it is preferable to have an "uncompromised" version for reference. In either case, the original tape should always be kept, and properly indexed, so that at any later stage, transcription can be made or checked.

Transcription and translation should be as accurate (or near verbatim) as possible. A summary of what was said will lose its color, individuality, and "oral" character. Metaphors, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions should be translated literally at first, even if they do not seem appropriate in English. Where necessary, an explanation of the meaning can be added in parentheses. Editing can be done later, but it is important not to lose the local character of the language at this stage.

Interviewers may wish to do minor editing themselves at the translation stage, perhaps to put events in the right order and bring all references to one topic together. They can do this in order to make the interview more coherent and readable, but nothing should be omitted. The selection of what is said and not said should be left to the editor of any book or similar project that eventually is developed out of the collected material.

Explanations of local references and any other relevant descriptions of the context of the interview should be appended to the text.

* This text was prepared by the PANOS Institute in London, May 1993, as a guide for local NGOs working in collaboration with them on oral-history based development projects. It has been reproduced here, with minor editorial modifications, with their gracious permission.

Back issues Available in Arabic:

Al-Jana Al-Arabi #4, December 1996

Articles:

* NGO Profile: Tamer Institute for Community education in Palestine

by Zeinab Saqqallah

* Zajal

by Assad Said

* Yusra Jawharieh 'Armita, Musicologist

* Abu Arab, Popular Poet and Singer

From Our Collection:

* Folk Tales and Songs

PALESTINIAN ORAL HISTORY FILE:

* Remembering the Near-East Broadcasting Station in pre-1948 Palestine (Part 1)



ORAL HISTORY AND THE PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY*



It is regrettable that in a period when priority was given to national struggle, little work was done in the domain of culture. It's true, of course, that many cultural forms were revived – first Palestinian embroidery, then dabkeh, song, and music. However, despite disparate individual efforts made, there was no systematic collective effort to record and preserve the rich Palestinian cultural heritage and historical experience. Such work is always important, for any human group. It takes on a special importance, however, for peoples forced, like a large part of the Palestinian people, to live in diaspora, severed from the territorial base of their history. And this importance becomes even greater in a period such as the present, when many people have lost their hope of return.

REASONS:

For at least two reasons, it's vitally important to begin oral history recording now:

- 1- There are very few left of the generation that lived in Palestine and are able to recording their recollections. Perhaps it should be an emergency project to search for people of "*dajil al-Pilastini*" before it is too late. [The experience of exile is also important to record, in its different phases, but that is not so urgent.]
- 2- Now is a time of political uncertainty, without clear signs for the future. Migratory pressures are increasing, existing refugee settlement areas are likely to be broken up, and thus the Palestinian community in Lebanon may be forced into yet further dispersion. This would increase the difficulty of finding old people and recording their recollections. It could also become more difficult politically to carry out work focused on the Palestinian cultural heritage and historical experience.

REQUIREMENTS:

Doing oral history work requires, first, a particular ideological perspective. We need to see ordinary people as repositories of history and culture, as having something valuable and interesting to say. This is a basic idea of oral history work, and it's an idea that is generally excluded from the history books and educational systems of the Arab world, which tend to overvalue urban culture, based in literacy, book learning, and university degrees. It's only in the last few years, and perhaps only in a few places in the Arab world, that people have begun to re-value "traditional" and popular modes of cultural expression. So we have to begin by re-orienting ourselves towards the multiple kinds of knowledge and culture possessed by people whom society calls "ignorant," "uneducated," "uncultured," "superstitious," and so on.

OBJECTIVES:

There are different purposes of oral history work, and these different purposes, of course, require somewhat differing methods. From our perspective, that is of doing oral history among Palestinians in Lebanon, there are two main objectives:

- 1- **The recovery of historical experience.** This kind of work might be focused on a particular event [say the war of 1948] or a period; or it could be directed towards a particular social group – for example peasants women, a political elite, a city, a region or camp.
- 2- **The recovery of cultural forms.** These are immensely various and include folktales, legends, proverbs, songs, music, oral poetry, manual crafts, beliefs about food and health, cures.

INFORMANTS:

Depending on what they are primarily interested in, oral history workers look for different human informants, and use somewhat different methods of interviewing and recording. In the case of ARCPA's current interests in using oral history to collect and recover folklore forms, I have a word of caution to extend that runs counter to most manuals available on the subject. It seems characteristic of most work that records cultural forms that *interest in the form itself obliterates interest in the human bearer of the form*, as well as in the social and historical context in which the human bearer confines to produce the form. It is as if the cultural artifact is valued in itself, as an object in an imaginary museum, without connection to history and human agency. From my point of view, this is a fault since, as an anthropologist and oral historian, I want to see *artifacts in relation to settings and people who produce them*, both in daily life and in the recording session, where another context is set up and more relations elaborated allowing the informant to offer specific material to a specific researcher at a specific moment in history.

What does it mean to pay attention to *human and relational aspects* of oral history work? I will offer in response an example from my personal experience which shows poignantly the importance of the social context in which the interview takes place. I once asked a woman from the camp to sing the song "*Hanin*," which is a type of song that is usually sung when pilgrims are gathering to prepare to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. The woman replied that she could not perform it except at the proper time and with real pilgrims. If you think about this, it makes sense. All cultural performances – unless they are done as an occupation – emerge from *feelings*, and these are aroused by particular people and occasions. If you cannot exactly recreate the proper time and occasion, at least try to create an *encouraging setting*.

Another example may make this more concrete and show how perseverance can pay off:

Umm Mohammad was originally unwilling to record when I first approached her to do an interview. She claimed sickness as an excuse, but I suspected the reason was really probably shyness or fear, not being used to speaking to or meeting strangers. I decided to visit her anyway. We sat chaffing in her bedroom, an informal atmosphere, cozy with the rain outside. I'd gotten wet on the way over, and that may have increased her feeling of pity for me. Her daughter and a friend were present, and their presence proved to be crucial. The daughter asked Umm Mohammad about her hometown, Jaffa, and the friend encouraged her memory. The result was a rich recording session.

BROADER CONTEXTS:

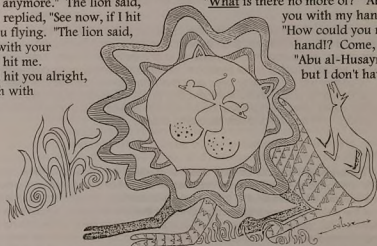
Inevitably, the broader historical context also has its effect on the atmosphere and mood. The present situation and outlook of Palestinians in Lebanon could hardly be worse as a context for oral history work: the present is too bleak and the future too uncertain. It is not easy at this point to convince people of the value of recording the past or rouse them to the point where they are eager to participate. Before 1982, gatherings of neighbors in camps used to be a fertile natural context for story telling and reminiscences; but I doubt that today they occur with the same frequency and spirit. Perhaps one of the few occasions that still provides an encouraging atmosphere is the wedding, and since weddings are also a natural stage for the display of cultural traditions, when people are often eager to explain particular forms of celebration, they offer oral history workers an opening not to be neglected.

* From an address delivered by Sayigh to ARCPA oral history collectors at a workshop held at the Center in January, 1995.

* The Cleverness of Abu al-Husayn

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a forest, and in it there were lions. One day, the lion was walking through the forest. Now, usually when the lion is out walking and Abu al-Husayn* sees him from thirty meters off, he changes his direction because it's not in his nature that if the lion is out walking, he should stick to his path. Rather, that would be a dishonor to the king of the forest.

So one day, the father of lions himself was out walking and it just so happened that Abu al-Husayn was in his way. He would not budge from the lion's path. The lion said to him, "Don't you know the rules of the forest, oh Abu al-Husayn?" He replied, "Old times have changed, and such rules no longer mean anything to me. Each person is now free to do as he pleases." The lion exclaimed, "What are you saying!" "Just what you're hearing," said Abu al-Husayn. The lion went to hit Abu al-Husayn when the animal said to him, "No, no, no...put your hand down, oh father of lions. There's no more hitting and beating anymore." The lion said, Husayn replied, "See now, if I hit send you flying." The lion said, me fly with your see you hit me. "Oh, I'd hit you alright, strength with me."



The lion asked him, "And where is your strength?" Abu al-Husayn said, "It's at home." So the lion told him, "Fine, hurry along home and get your strength." To which Abu al-Husayn said, "Yeah, and what would guarantee me that you'll stay here?" The lion roared, "I, the father of lions, the king of the whole forest, would I want to run away from a weakling like you? Alright, what's your condition so that you know I'll stay?" Abu al-Husayn said, "I want to tie you up to this tree and as soon as I get back I'll let you go, just as soon as I get my strength."

Well, Abu al-Husayn got a rope and tied the lion up. Then he sat showing his muscles off next to the lion. One day, two days, three without food and the lion got weaker and weaker. His lips dried and started peeling, and he was dying of thirst. Three or four more days like this and the lion would die. On one day Abu al-Husayn might throw him a piece of hide, on another day some intestines, another day, nothing at all.

One day, the mouse came out — from where? From underneath the lion, from under the tree he came up to the lion. The lion said to the mouse, "Please, free me and whatever you wish for I shall give you." The mouse replied, "I have one condition; if you want me to free you, I have one condition." So the lion said, "Name it." The mouse told him, "I want you to kiss my hand and my foot." The lion exclaimed, "What do you mean? The lion should kiss the hand of a mouse and his foot, too? That's a hard condition that is." The mouse said, "So stay tied up!" The lion said, "Fine, I'll kiss them for you." The mouse, of course, is known for being good at gnawing ropes. The lion went ahead and kissed his hand and his foot, and so the mouse gnawed the rope apart and then returned to his hole.

The lion came to as if out of a daze, looked about himself, and shook himself off a bit, just so. Then after looking around the forest, he set about running through it. The lion was running and running, and the other animals were all amazed because normally the lion doesn't run. So there he was running about, and who should see him but the tiger. The tiger saw him and said to him, "What's up, oh father of lions? I see you running about and you don't normally do so. It's not right by the rules of the forest that the lion should run about in it. The lion always walks a royal walk through the forest!"

The lion replied, "Oh father of tigers, the forest is no longer livable." "My goodness! What's the matter?" asked the tiger. The lion explained to him,

"The fox is tying things up and the mouse is undoing them" *...
the forest is no longer livable."



Narrator: As'ad Abu Dahish
Provenance: Ya'bad
Current Residence: Rashadiyyeh Camp, Tyre

Recorded by: Jaber Abu Hawash
Date of Recording: April 3, 1997
Translator: Kirsten Scheid Idries

* Abu al-Husayn is the folk name for a kind of fox, distinguished by his tail, who appears in many Palestinian folk proverbs. He is notorious for being crafty and deceptive.

** This closing proverb is borrowed from *One Thousand and One Nights*.



Certificate of Appreciation Presented to Participants during follow-up interviews

"THIS ILLITERATE WOMAN... SHE TALKED TO US":



Participants' Responses to ARCPA's 1948 Uprooting Oral History Project

"Maybe this year you'll find me alive and next year gone, but it will be enough that you say, this illiterate woman, when you remember her, still as much as she could, she talked to us and made us happy with her memories of Palestine". With these words, Fatima Hanafi, an elderly woman, described her talk and explained her enthusiasm for participating in ARCPA's 1948 Uprooting Oral History Project. The project will be published by ARCPA in 1998 in a set of learning packs. Fatima was one of several interviewees who agreed to be interviewed for a follow-up session. Below are the transcripts from a series of these follow-up interviews that took place with Palestinian refugees in Sidon and Tyre. For these follow-up interviews, the staff members, Bushra al-Moghrabi in Sidon and Jaber Abu Hawash in Tyre, who conducted the original interviews accompanied by two more interviewers, Ghina Ismael and Kirsten Scheld. It should be noted that Ghina is a Palestinian in her early twenties and that Kirsten is an American-Lebanese in her late twenties. Ghina was treated by many of the interviewees as a granddaughter in need of some teaching, which certainly infected the tone of some of the conversations conducted. Kirsten's American passport, likewise, had significant import for some interviewees, when they turned the interview back to her and asked her to comment upon or explain American policy!

Our thanks go to the interviewees for giving us yet more of their time, to Bushra and Jaber for continuing their devoted work and for reflecting out loud upon their experiences thus far, to Ghina Ismael for aiding us in the carrying out of the follow-up interviews, to Rula 'Ali and Randa Abu Moghaysib for helping with the cassettes' transcription, and to Hisham Kayed for his thoughtful photographs. All translations are by Kirsten Scheld.

Interviewee: Jaber Yunis and his wife
Provenance: Safsaf, Safad region
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 25, 1997, Sidon

Ghina: Why, in your opinion, did no one talk about the massacre at Safsaf?

Jaber: Listen friend, the people of Safsaf will tell you that they left there like, you could say, having lost all consciousness. When they [the Zionists] occupied this area, and put the young men in a row and shot them...well what could the people do? They got out of there. We sought medical treatment in Baalbek, others in Burj al-Shimali. Then they were moved to 'Ain el-Helweh [camp]. No one said a thing, figuring that it was all over: they ate our country, and so it was over. No one thought there was any future, that was the general opinion...Me and my cousin were among the survivors of the massacre. The Jews came and shot at us, but we were still living underneath the dead bodies. So the Jews came closer to see who could still talk or move, to shoot them a second time. We, you know, were lying down, and when we felt them draw close, put their faces near us, I turned my head a

bit and stopped breathing while they stood right over our heads and looked to see who was alive and who dead. So, I mean, you can understand, not one of us who survived went and asked any questions or spoke up, nor did anyone come to ask us who was responsible....

Ghina: When Bushra came and asked about this topic, what did you feel at first? Were you immediately enthusiastic, or were you pleased that someone came to ask you?

Jaber: No, it's not like that. I told Bushra,

"Fine, you waited until today, forty-nine years having passed, and you came today to ask."

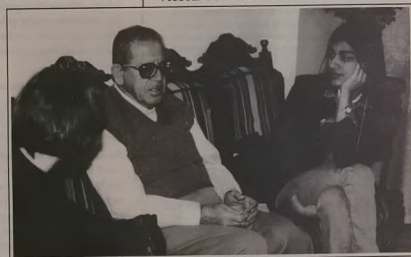
That's what I said to Bushra, "You've come late, so what good can this do anymore?"

Ghina: So you weren't enthusiastic at first to talk?

Jaber: I'm enthusiastic and willing to talk to each and everyone who comes to ask me -- why wouldn't I be? But, I said to her, "My friend, your question is long overdue." I told her, "Of course I'm willing to talk, why not?" I'm someone whose enemy came to slay him, and his brothers and cousins...so why wouldn't I want to talk to her about that?

Ghina: So what was your reason for talking, just to make a speech, or because you felt like sharing this experience with people?

Jaber: No, I didn't want to make any grand speeches. People came to ask what happened to us, so let these people explain to the world's opinion that we are a people who have been robbed. Yes or no?



Ghina: So you felt this was fulfilling your duty?

Jaber: Yes, I'm fulfilling my duty.

Kirsten: So do you think that talking is still of

any use?

Jaber: Well, that's got to be your decision, based on how you see the future of this talk.

Kirsten: We hope to distribute your talk in published form to people and make some impact.

Jaber: Yes, yes.

Ghina: As far as the *hajjah* [Jaber's wife] is concerned, what were your feelings when Bushra came to ask you what happened to you in Palestine?

Jaber's wife: *Ahlan wa sahan..* I was happy to talk about Palestine's fate and what happened to us, how we were tortured, the pain we experienced. Then the *hajj* took over....

Ghina: Why?

Bushra: Well, originally the discussion was directed toward the *hajj*. She would contribute, but she was very moved and had some difficulty, because she lived through all this....

Jaber's wife: Ahhh, of course I was moved, because that was my past. When they [the Zionists] came in, may God not take me back to that period -- I mean, in ten days, we can't explain what happened to us. Let the *hajj* speak.... [A long detailed account of Jaber's survival of the massacre and subsequent actions follows. This account will be published as part of ARCPA's 1948 Uprooting booklet series.]

Ghina: When Bushra came and asked you about Palestine, had it been a long time since anyone asked you to talk about this subject?



No one said a thing, figuring that it was all over: they ate our country, and so it was over. No one thought there was any future



Jaber: Yes.

Jaber's wife: Yeah.

Ghina: So how did it make you feel afterwards to talk about these things that you hadn't talked about in so long?

Jaber: What should we feel? The whole thing is long over. When Bushra came we said, "Your wish is our command, dear Bushra, whatever you want, we'll talk about." I mean, all these people talk about Deir Yassin, but the number of people killed in Deir Yassin is only a quarter of those who died in Safsaf, believe it by God. And they made a big deal about it, while in Safsaf 60 young men were killed after thirteen hours of resistance. So it wasn't by flight that people left Safsaf....

Kirsten: Do you know that there are people in inside Palestine who are trying to make a statue in memory of the massacre of Deir Yassin, and they want to put it across from the memorial to the Holocaust. Of course, the Israelis don't want to let them. But do you wish that such a thing were done to commemorate Safsaf?

Jaber: Why not? I wish that everyone, young man or woman would talk about the memory of Palestine, I mean, not forget Palestine. I don't want anyone else's citizenship: I won't leave Palestine.

Ghina: Okay, but when you were asked to talk about Palestine, I mean, were you made uncomfortable, pained by any of the memories?

Jaber: I felt that I might go cry.

Jaber's wife: I get a tight feeling all over. My heart starts beating and shakes my whole chest. His talking makes me tired, and I live it all, all over again. I mean, we're not ever going to forget these things that happened to us, not until we're buried. Only then. I mean, when we're back living in palaces, with everything we needed, happy with everything, just sitting under the olive trees eating olives and watercress, and green all about under the trees, then we will be happy. Only in our own country can we live such a life....Where's the peace? No one can

force them, and he [Netanyahu] doesn't want peace; he doesn't want to obey America or the world. Just seeing him makes me faint, because we're the ones who are right....

Kirsten: Now do you feel that you're talking back to America and the world?

Jaber's wife: Yes.

Kirsten: Did you feel at that time, though, that you weren't capable of doing so?

Jaber's wife: No, not capable. How would we be: peasants, their land occupied, overcome, unarmed, without anything?

Jaber: Palestinians are not a cowardly people, but without arms, what can you do?

Kirsten: Okay, but now people aren't talking about the right of return anymore, so do you feel now that you're talking to us and we're planning to publish this, that you're finally speaking up to America and the world who've forgotten you?

Jaber and his wife: Of course, that's what we feel.

Jaber's wife: That we must do, or else what can we do?

Kirsten: Do you tell your grandchildren about Palestine?

Jaber's wife: Naturally I tell them, so that they will hear how our life was, how we left our lands, what happened to us. They all know now. My daughter's daughters come and say, "Tell us, grandmother." And I do. I tell them that we were peasants and satisfied; all our bounty was from our own labor. All that stuff people here buy, we peasants don't buy. That's how it was generally in all Palestine. So we hope that the decent people of the world, in

America, Australia, Russia, etc. will have sympathy for us and solve this problem. How do you see it?



Interviewee: Ahmad Daheer al-Issa
Provenance: Safaria
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 25, 1997, Sidon

Ghina: First thing, when Bushra came to talk to you, and asked you to tell her about Palestine and how you had to leave, what was your reaction?

Ahmad: *Wallahi*, my reaction was very positive indeed, and I was very happy about this because it meant to me raising our voices to the world, I mean so it would hear what we were, what we became, how we were wronged... I was really happy.

Ghina: When you talked with Bushra about this subject, had it been a long time since you'd talked about it with anyone?

Ahmad: Actually, I talked about it, I think, in 1978.

Ghina: Whom did you talk to then?



The truth is, I felt that there are still people asking about us, so we're not lost. As long as there are people who are asking, asking about us and our lives and what happened to us, I mean, we're not abandoned.



Ahmad: Reporters came at that time, Arabs. They sat and asked almost the same questions, and I answered them because they didn't know anything about Palestine -- they grew up recently. They asked how it all happened and such...that was in 1978.

Ghina: So far about twenty years you haven't talked about it -- a long time.

Ahmad: 19 years.

Ghina: So what did you feel this time when you sat down to talk about this subject after not having talked about it for so long?

Ahmad: The truth is, I felt that there are still people asking about us, so we're not lost. As long as there are people who are asking, asking about us and our lives and what happened to us, I mean, we're not abandoned.

Ghina: Were some things painful to remember? Ahmad: Not at all, because I told the truth, what happened.

Ghina: Was it easy for you to remember everything?

Ahmad: Yes, because I was mature, not a child. I left when I was 22 years old, so I easily know things aside from the history that they taught us about Palestine in the schools.

Ghina: I'm sure there were some very sad memories for you.

Ahmad: Yes, it's true.

Ghina: Were you disturbed by remembering them?

Ahmad: Of course, it's only natural.

Ghina: Was there anything you had thought that you'd forgotten or no longer affected you that, while you were talking to Bushra, you found yourself being moved by all over again?

Ahmad: Oh, of course.

Ghina: What most of all?

Ahmad: Most of all, leaving one's home and country, of course; that's something that moves one deeply, because I went back to Palestine in 1983....

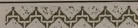
Ghina: Oh, you made a visit?

Ahmad: I went back in 1983 for a visit. I would see my possessions, my house, my land, and I was too embarrassed to say, "That's mine." Of course, whenever I saw anything that belonged to me, I would be deeply moved and cry. I mean, tears would fall straight-away.

Ghina: Now you know that by talking [to Bushra] you were participating in a project that ARCPA was undertaking. What was it that made you want to participate in this project?



I was very happy about this because it meant to me raising our voices to the world, I mean so it would hear what we were, what we became, how we were wronged



Ahmad: Really what motivated me was my confidence that this project was directed toward the Palestinian people, that it is a way of making the people's voice heard abroad, to those who want to know what the people's intentions were, what their desires were, what their demands were, what befell them -- for these reasons I liked the project.

Kirsten: Do you tell the younger generation now about your life in Palestine?

Ahmad: Yes.

Ghina: Do you feel your children have a comprehension of and sense of belonging to Palestine? Did you strive to pass that on to them?

Ahmad: Yes, of course. And I always would tell them that we own specific houses and lands and orchards there.

Kirsten: Now we're recording, and Bushra also recorded your words, and we're planning to publish this interview and translate it into English, so it will be published in both Arabic and English in our magazine; so, what do you hope for in response from the readers, both foreigners and fellow Palestinians?

Ahmad: *Wallahi*, I hope that all people will hear out our problem and know that we are a wronged group, kicked out of our country and lost, and see ours as they do the Jews -- how they were treated by the Nazis, massacred, so that to this day no one has forgotten that massacre. To this day they still remind the whole world of the Nazis' blow. Well, they [the Israelis] dealt us a steeper blow than the Nazis by several degrees. And I would like our voices to be heard by the world, that we are a people who were wrongly exiled. Nobody who looks at our issue

has been able to solve it, despite the many resolutions of the United Nations. People know, for example, that we are an oppressed lot, dispersed in exile to the corners of the world. We the Palestinian people are



exiled all over the world, in Europe, America, Arab countries...wherever we are, no one feels sympathy for us, and the world is silent. Why? I don't know.



Interviewee: Fatima 'Abd al-Salam Hanafi
Provenance: Al-Kasasyyer, Haifa
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 27, 1997, Tyre

Ghina: Jaber asked you when he came about how you left Palestine. We don't want to make you repeat that story. We just want to ask you what was your first reaction when Jaber came? Did you immediately want to talk, or...

Fatima: Yes, my reaction was very positive. And even though normally, with my health, I felt a bit dizzy or uncomfortable, with this, I felt my chest expanded -- do you understand, sweet-heart? -- and my spirit and life opened. Praise be to God. I mean, I was very happy, with every

question Jaber asked me. And had I been able to talk more, I would have been happy to. And even though now I've been talking to you, and for a month I've been sick with a bit of nausea and dizziness in my head, but today I'm not, praise be to God...



Jaber: May you recover speedily, auntie.

Kirsten: We don't want to take too much of your time, auntie. Was this the first time somebody came and asked you about these things in a formal manner?

Fatima: No, it wasn't. But we -- how should I tell you? -- often talk among ourselves. I keep remembering what we did, how we came and went [in Palestine]. May those days rest in peace. And I wish we'd never left Palestine....

Kirsten: What did you feel that you had inside you that needed to be told to Jaber so he could publicize it?

Fatima: Whatever I can tell him.

Kirsten: I mean, what did you feel that you personally know about the history of Palestine?

Fatima: *Wallahi*, what can I tell you? It's true that when I left Palestine I was fifteen, sixteen years old and only three months married, you see. But, I mean, the memories are still strong. I mean, imagine that, in 1980, after all this long

exile, I returned to my region, I walked through it and contemplated it -- I wanted to walk about in it. Praise be to God.... [She goes on spontaneously to recount her story of the events leading up to her leaving Palestine.]

Ghina: Auntie, you were telling us that as soon as Jaber came your chest was filled with joy. Why? Because you were talking about things you felt like talking about?

Fatima: Of course, of course.

Ghina: Okay, what did you feel -- did you feel that your talk was important, apart from that you were remembering things you like to recount...?

Fatima: Of course. I

mean, in relation to Jaber, when a person who was born here, and you too, and this whole generation of youth, is still asking about Palestine, its ways, and how people were living there...Of course, if I weren't happy that would make me happy. When I start talking about these matters, even if I weren't open to talking about them, I would immediately become so. I feel pride. When I see generations born here and asking what is Palestine, that's one thing -- like all of you, praise be to God, they still want to hear about Palestine, its customs, its sacred land. How could I not be happy? I'm being re-born again! I feel that I'm being made a young girl again, born anew, when I see people like your honored selves asking about memories that are unforgettable. How could I not be happy, my sweetheart?

Ghina: Jaber told you that your interview with him will be published not just in Arabic but also in English, because we want to send the magazine abroad. We want the people who are living abroad, too, to hear these stories.

Fatima: May God reward you with blessings.

Ghina: So what do you hope this interview will have in the way of influence on people?

Fatima: *Wallahi*, the decent people, like yourselves, with such consciences, when they hear such stories, of course, will be affected, strongly affected. And may God reward them; I mean, I wish them good fortune and everything good. Because, of course, by publicizing these happy memories, they're showing the whole world what Palestine means, what her inhabitants suffered, what they accomplished.... Certainly, my dear. Maybe this year you'll find me alive and next year gone, but it will be enough that you say, this illiterate woman, when you remember her, still, as much as she could she talked to us and made us happy with her memories of Palestine. That makes me proud for you more than it gives me pride in myself!

Ghina: Certainly, auntie, the memories that you and your companions tell about form a part of our history. Do you feel that when we are putting together this history, it's our duty to write down only the good things from this past or should we also talk about the bad?

Fatima: How so?

Jaber: Well, there are things that are not good that happened along with the good things...

Maybe this year you'll find me alive
and next year gone, but it will be
enough that you say, this illiterate
woman, when you remember her,
still, as much as she could she talked
to us and made us happy with her
memories of Palestine

Fatima: How do you mean not good?

Jaber: Well, the Palestinian people, defended themselves, but there were also traitors who came out of them, we must allow...

Fatima: Yes, we must allow that. We were rebels, people who got their food and weapons from their own purse. The person who didn't have money to buy a gun would sell his wife's gold, would sell his cow, the source of his milk and yogurt, and say, "So I can buy a gun to fight the *jihad* for my land and country." And the rebels, bravo! [She tells how the revolutionary groups worked until the Arab armies took over.] Here I will talk and not be afraid; 100% I'll tell you about it.

Jaber: Okay, Auntie, there is that positive side that you now mentioned. There are other, negative aspects, too. For example, there were betrayals, Palestinians who sold their land. Should we talk about those things, too?

Fatima: Yes, of course. The people who sold to the Jews, we considered traitors, even if [they sold] only a foot of land. If a person reported to the English that so-and-so is a resistance fighter, the rebels would get him and kill him in a flash; nothing stopped them -- even if he were someone's brother. No matter, when it comes to land and the country....But, God be praised, we remained without selling a single foot of land. Our people didn't sell any....



Interviewer: Suleiman 'Abd al-Rizaq
Provenance: Shafaa 'Amr
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 25, 1997, Sidon

Ghina: *Haji*, we'd first like to know, when Bushra came to talk to you about '48, what was your first reaction, what did you feel?

Suleiman: I was very happy, you see, because she said they wanted to publicize this situation which we lived in and witnessed. Any questions

you want to ask me, daughter, go ahead and ask.

Ghina: You were happy, why?

Suleiman: Because they [ARCPA] want to make clear the Palestinians' situation, what became of them in the end.

Ghina: This was the first time someone came and asked you about Palestine?

otherwise? I was very moved and made happy that they want to clarify for the world what happened to the Palestinians.

Ghina: So you mean you were pleased in regards to your feelings of carrying out a duty?

Suleiman: Yes.

Ghina: And as regards your personal feelings?

Suleiman: Personally as well, I was very happy.

Ghina: When you were talking about your experience, was there anything you worried you had forgotten?

Suleiman: I forget nothing of the Palestinian past, nothing at all. I've memorized all that happened to me, even though there's no one at my age who's still as aware as I am. I was born in 1905 and my age is now 92. Praise

be to God.

Ghina: Did relating any particular memory distress you?

Suleiman: No, I'm not ever distressed by anything. Nothing disturbs me.

Ghina: What sticks out most in your imagination regarding the *hijra* period of exodus, the thing you are most moved by?

Suleiman: Our leaving Palestine was very difficult for us. My wife was with me, and she was fearful. I didn't want to leave, but we had small children. So when the Jews started to strike at the Palestinian people, she was afraid for the children, and so she took them out. Oh, there is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet...

Ghina: You know that this talk with you will be published in our magazine, *Al-Jana*, and that it will come out in English, so that we can propagate your talk to the largest possible number of

people living abroad. So how do you expect your talk to influence people reading it abroad?

Suleiman: They will be pleased, of course, because for them, it will be something they didn't know about and will learn about.

Kirsten: What's expected of them after they read this?

Suleiman: What's expected is that they help the Palestinian people and return to them their homeland; that's what's expected.

Ghina: You have a hope that they will help you?

Suleiman: I hold out hope for that from God. I hope that everyone returns, and I die in Palestine.... [This provokes laughter from the listeners.]

Ghina: In your opinion why do people not know a lot about the Palestinian issue?

Suleiman: What's to be said? There are people, God preserve you from such a fate, just thick-skulled....

Ghina: Usually, when people have been treated unjustly, they let the whole world know about their problems. Take the Jews for example; everyone's heard about the injustice they were exposed to by the Nazis. So why doesn't the whole world know about what's been done to us?

Suleiman: Because there hasn't been anyone to clarify it for them, you see.

Ghina: Are all the Palestinians you know like you in that they are happy to tell their memories? Is there no one who doesn't want to talk?

Suleiman: That's wrong of them. One must clarify what happened, one must talk about

Those who don't want to talk, may
God preserve you from this fate, it's
just a matter of stupidity.

everything having to do with his country. Those who don't want to talk, may God preserve you from this fate, it's just a matter of stupidity. [More laughter]

Ghina: So should one remember and talk about even the things that weren't positive. Should they be told, too?

Suleiman: No, because discussion of the things that are not good would be insulting to the Palestinian people.



Interviewee: Im Hussein Dahish
Provocation: Zehdine
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 27, 1997, Tyre

Ghina: We'd like to know when Jaber came to ask you about this subject, how did you feel? What was your reaction?

Im Hussein: What was my reaction? The whole thing has been a conspiracy against the Palestinian people, from the beginning to the end, and so I told him how the story happened. [She recounts her story of how her village fell to Israeli control largely because of Arab complicity.]

Kirsten: Auntie, do you tell this story to all people, or was Jaber the first to ask you about it?

Im Hussein: Why? No, I always tell this story, to each person who comes and asks about the Palestinian issue. I always tell my children that this is what happened to us when I was twelve years old.

Kirsten: So were you surprised when Jaber came and told you he was working with a research center? Were you surprised that some people have come to be interested in the topic?

Im Hussein: No, I wasn't surprised because in the end, people will have to pay attention.

Kirsten: And so why do you like to retell this story?

Im Hussein: Because the entire Palestinian

Suleiman: Yes, the first time, it's true.

Ghina: And had it been a long time for you since you talked to anyone about this subject?

Suleiman: No, I mean, it's not like there's anyone who comes and asks such questions for official purposes normally. It's my character that, whenever a group like you would come, we'd sit and talk about the past, what happened, what we did in Palestine -- we would talk about this among ourselves, not with strangers. None came to ask. Any questions you want to ask, sweetheart, just ask; I'm the source of all information.

Ghina: We'd like to know how this discussion with Bushra affected you. I mean, when you began this experience of being interviewed, that you're saying was the first of its kind for you, did it leave a mark on you, move you in anyway?

Suleiman: But of course, how could it be

people are oppressed and wronged. If they're in Lebanon and a single knife is found on them, they [the Lebanese] will keep on beating them until they die. The same is true for all the other Arab [host] countries.



Jaber: Auntie, I want to ask you something. There's still something -- when I came and asked you about the subject of what happened before '48, what did you feel at that moment? Did you feel nostalgia for your country and the days of living there? Did you immediately remember something in particular...?

Im Hussein: I remember our homeland all the time, how we were free there, how colonialism came in and destroyed us...

Ghina: Now you tell this story to your children and grandchildren all the time?

Im Hussein: Of course.

Ghina: But maybe this is the first time you told it to an official organization?

Im Hussein: Yes, it's the first time I tell it to an organization.

Ghina: So why did you tell it to this organization? I mean, if you tell it to this organization, what do you expect to happen?

Im Hussein: I expect that all the people will know how we were oppressed, and how to this

very day we continue to sacrifice... I have a brother who died in the Revolution, and if every day one boy is raised, there won't be any like him. He could put a crate of lemons between his teeth and lift it over his head. The bamboo

chair, when he grabbed it by the teeth, he could raise it above his head. The best men of Palestine were lost in the Revolution.

Ghina: And if people knew, what do you think it's possible would happen?

Im Hussein: Well, I think it's possible that people would side a bit with the Palestinians, be just towards them

because they have been so wronged.

Ghina: You feel that no one is siding with them?

Im Hussein: Only now have some states acted. Only now have some European states come to understand, while Israel always blamed everything on the Arabs -- the Arabs, the Arabs -- We were living together, the Jews and us, all alike, until the Zionists came, and then those in the names of the Arab countries and the powerful countries, and thus they seized Palestine.

Kirsten: Were there things that you told to Jaber that you found hard to talk about?

Im Hussein: No, I found no difficulty in any of it.

Ghina: Were you able to remember everything? Did you feel uncomfortable recalling anything?

Im Hussein: I remembered everything. I was only a schoolgirl at the time [of the events], but there was no smarter than me. But of course one feels uncomfortable when remembering one's orchards, land, fruits that we used to eat, the herds we had. We didn't use to buy anything

from the market in order to live. We would live entirely off our own daily reaping, and everyday we would take our surplus to Haifa, because we lived in an orchard region.

Ghina: Jaber talked to many people, you know, not just with you, about Palestine. There are some things that you all talked about the same way, and some that you talked about a little bit differently. What is the most important aspect of Palestinian history for you? I mean, if we were to summarize the history of Palestine, what are the most important points and periods?

Im Hussein: The most important period is that of our becoming refugees and them giving us rations instead of helping us to return. They invented the United Nations and started the rations for the Palestinian people -- that was all wrong.

Ghina: Any closing remarks?



I just want to ask that the listeners help the Palestinian issue, just that.

Maybe I might remain alive and finally have my burial in my country. Maybe I might be able to remain alive and not die before I return.



Im Hussein: I just want to ask that the listeners help the Palestinian issue, just that. Maybe I might remain alive and finally have my burial in my country. Maybe I might be able to remain alive and not die before I return.



Interviewee: Abu 'Ali (pseudonym)
Provenance: Nazareth region
Date & Place of Interview:
Dec 27, 1997, Tyre



[Before the questions began, Abu 'Ali took the initiative and asked Ghina where her family was originally from. When he found out that she had been told next to nothing about the village by her father, he scolded her, teased her mercilessly, and proceeded to supply her with information for the first fifteen minutes or so.]

Ghina: What was your reaction when Jaber came to ask you about this topic, about Palestine and how you left it?

Abu 'Ali: At first I refused.

Ghina: You refused at first, why? [Abu 'Ali delayed answering her question until his wife had brought him his *kuffiyyeh* and *aqal*; only then did he allow the interviewing to continue and photographing to begin, explaining that now he was more properly dressed.]

Abu 'Ali: Well, in the first place, I'm a man of few words; people talk to much in general, and there's always much for them to talk about. And also, I'm still wanted in Israel -- but that's something that's in God's hands -- you see...[He relates his capture and prison experience. Further, he tells us about his past interrogations and then makes it clear to us that this interview experience reminds him of those.] I refused because I know that Israel's reach is wide, and the reality is that I have trust, with all due respect, neither in journalists nor...in the religious leaders or other powerful people of the camps. And this lack of trust among Palestinians is 99% of our problem in the current period.

Ghina: So how did you then change your mind and decide to talk with Jaber?

Abu 'Ali: I called Jaber after seeing an interview he did on television, one with Mohammed Dawkar. I called him and thanked him, because we lack this kind of information, on heritage things.

Jaber: There's something I want to ask you. When I was interviewing you, every time you'd mention your father, your eyes would get teary. What was the reason for this?

Abu 'Ali: Is it easy to remember one's parents? [His voice wavering:] I'm sentimental about my mother and father... I think I told you that story last time, about the Jewish intelligence agents, when they cursed my



parents during an interrogation. "Abu Sharif," the one in charge of their intelligence agency, began by asking about this and that and this and that -- he drove me crazy! I said, "How dare you curse my parents? In your eyes, I'm nothing but a scoundrel -- but my mother and father! What you say to me about the land and the ocean, fine...in your eyes I'm a scoundrel, but I retain my dignity." I told him, "Yes I fought in '48, carrying a gun, yes, yes, and if I'd won, then none of this would have happened. How many wars have you waged now? [The conversation he is recalling took place in 1984]. I fought in defense of my land and house. So I'm the destructive one and you're the one who's reconstructing and building, who came from Poland or Holland or God knows where!" He didn't answer a single question. [...] I said "As far as I'm concerned, curse my land, and country, and my dignity, but isn't that enough? Do you have to curse my mother and father as well? Haven't you had enough? When my parents were alive, they were unable to help me -- isn't that sufficient?" [He breaks into tears.]

Ghina: So when you decided you could trust Jaber, what was it that made you want to talk? What was your personal motive?

Abu 'Ali: The motive was basically that the story is an old one, an emotional one, so that's what made me talk.

Ghina: Uncle, I mean, did you want to talk to make a big speech, or to take advantage of a chance to recall memories, or to perform a national duty? I mean, what did you expect from giving this talk to Jaber? What benefit could it offer?

Abu 'Ali: Well, maybe we could write a book or booklets

and publish them -- that was my ambition.

[Noticing that one of the interviewers is of American origin, he offers his explanation of why the Zionists have been so successful getting Americans to side with them while the Palestinians haven't.]

Kirsten: Were you surprised when Jaber came to you and told you about the Center's project and that he wanted information from you for it?

Abu 'Ali: No, I was not surprised. There are many people who have come to me...[to explain why this is so, Abu 'Ali describes the mediating role he played in several critical areas of the camp's history.]

Ghina: Do you tell your grandchildren about Palestine?

Abu 'Ali: Of course. They've memorized everything, so I think they understand...

Ghina: What do you hope for after the publication of this talk? Because, we are going to publish this in English for the people who are living abroad...

Abu 'Ali: As long as you use a pseudonym. You know the Israelis took many more pictures than you are taking, many...[he goes on to recount the

interrogation story, until Ghina cuts him off].

Ghina: Do you have a special hope for the talk that you've given us, or did you just give it to comply with Jaber's request?

Abu 'Ali: To time -- I gave it to time. It's our right. I think that the Jews will hear my voice filled with conviction and know I'm telling the truth, that it's really happened to me.

Ghina: Do you feel that our story is not well known?

Abu 'Ali: Yes and no. I mean, if we're as internally divided as we are, each living and going his own way, our trust in each other broken -- so how about the foreigners?

Kirsten: Uncle, you were saying that there's a lack of trust at present in the Palestinian community and in the greater Arab community. Now, when you tell us [about Palestine], do you think it is your duty to tell us about the negative things done by Palestinians, or just the positive ones?

Ghina: If we want to talk about our history, what should we talk about?

How?

Abu 'Ali: *Wallahi*, if I want to talk about our history, I want to tell the bad things and the good things. How will we learn from our mistakes? He who acts, errs. These organizations, I support all of them fine, but



Look, my brother, if you have a store, don't you do inventory and accounting at the year's end?... If we don't criticize ourselves, how will we ever fix ourselves?



they boast so much. Look, my brother, if you have a store, don't you do inventory and accounting at the year's end?

If every year we're going 15 meters deeper into the mud -- what is this! [He gives examples of Palestinian leaders who would have benefited from such self-criticism.] If we don't criticize ourselves, how will we ever fix ourselves?



Interviewer: Kamal al-Dibsi
Provenance: Tarslib
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 27, 1997, Tyre

Ghina: We don't want you to go back and tell us all over again what you told Jaber. What we'd like to know is about the interview, when Jaber came to interview about this topic, what was your reaction?

Kamal: *Wallahi*, in truth, I would have liked, in regards to my past and life, I would have liked to remain anonymous, even not to shed any light on it. I mean, in truth, I never thought I'd be a merchant of information...

Ghina: So you didn't want to talk at first?

Kamal: There are things I know that it would be a shame if they were simply buried by history. Bury them? No, they should be written about.

Ghina: So you were saying that certain things should not be buried by history. Now when you say "history," do you feel that the history we should show to the world should include the bad things from our past or just the good?

Kamal: There are things from that period, that I had to do...

Ghina: I don't mean personal matters...

Jaber: Uncle, let me clarify. Regarding our pre-'48 history, there were negative and positive things; some for the uprooting period and so on. So, if one were to discuss these historical periods, in your opinion, should one discuss both the good and the bad?

Kamal: Well, with regards to the '40s, the Jews



accepted the Partition plan in 1947, but with bad intentions; they never planned to co-exist with the Arabs. They planned to create two separate states. So the Arabs, when they refused the plan at that time...and we Palestinians weren't even a state then, just an isolated people...what I mean is, the real blow came from Britain, in truth. [He continues forward with his review of the people who've wronged the Palestinians up to the present.]

Ghina: Uncle, if you are talking about Palestine's history and you recall mistakes made by Palestinians, what do you do? Do you mention them? Or do you say, "No, I'd better not talk about them because it will affect world opinion?"

Kamal: No. Historically, Arab regimes have good and bad sides....

Ghina: Yes, so my question is, do we discuss them?

Kamal: No, [discussing] the negative things could bring harm to the writer or teller, because, in truth, we've been the victims of an Arab conspiracy...if you want the truth.



Ghina: Now that you've given us this interview, what do you hope will happen?

Kamal: In the future?

Ghina: I mean, what is the positive aspect of

giving such an interview? You know we're doing this for a research center, not for personal curiosity?

Kamal: It's for the coming generations. Of course, the things I talked about and experienced -- they are to be considered history. Now you have to take my personal history and tie it together with everyone else's.

Ghina: So you consider this a way of preserving history. For whom? When you're retelling a story, who do you think should make up its audience?

Kamal: By God, every person in this world is free to hear or not.

Ghina: But you, to you, whom does it matter that your voice and story reaches?

Kamal: Foremost -- you want to know the truth? -- the West, America -- that they may understand that this Palestinian people has been wronged.

Ghina: You said the most important thing for you was to have your voice reach the West -- why?

Kamal: Not that they may understand me personally. That they may understand the pains the Palestinian people have suffered.

That this people -- why did they fight; why did they take revenge; why did they carry a gun? Why don't they have the right to return? These things you can sense in the heart of each Palestinian....

[He launches into a discussion of how Palestinians accept all religions and can co-exist but cannot accept to be kicked out of the country where their grandfathers were born.] People had hope that this condition wouldn't last fifty years.

I mean, in truth, I never thought I'd be a merchant of information....

Jaber: Uncle, given that you were a trainer who taught children for years, did you try to teach them about oral history?

Kamal: Of course. I told it to them in story form. Kids love to hear about heroic acts, and sacrifices -- I would take them back in time and walk with them in the past. Then I'd tell them, "You will be the continuation of this past." And in truth, we were successful in this.

Jaber: Did you use to sense an impact of these issues on the children?

Kamal: Look, children don't understand if you tell them history. They understand stories. I mean, you have to tie the history to an heroic figure -- that so-and-so did this and you will continue, carry the flag....But to a thirteen-year-old, you'd tell him history? You must address children in child-oriented methods: stories of martyrs, heroes, any adventure, love of sacrifice, love of dignified life, love of identity.... The most important thing is that the Arab children, and especially the Palestinians, come to understand that there is a cause, that of Palestine, its land, and the exile of its people. And include pictures. Listen, ask, ask me, what do you want to ask?

Ghina: No, we just wanted to ask these things about when Jaber came.

Kamal: This Jaber, he just came late!



Interviewee: Bushra Al-Maghbrabi
Provenance: Tabari, Ma'athur
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 25, 1997, Sidon

Ghina: What was your personal motivation for

taking on this work?

Bushra: At the radio station where I worked as a journalist there was a regular report on Palestine. In the period given to me during this broadcast, I would do special reports. At first I did a program on the Intifada. Then I did a second program on the history of Palestine -- for example, how the Zionists came to Palestine, the developments up to the Balfour declaration. Now this second section became quite diverse and came to include something like oral history such as we later did with ARCPA. There was a section called, "Lest We Forget." I would talk in it about a certain village each time. I tried, as much as possible, to host someone from that village and get them to talk about the daily life, customs, and traditional ways there. That idea was even before ARCPA's project was announced, about ten years before.

After we finished the program, I found that continuation of it was necessary, and that it had to be in more depth than previously. I mean, yes the radio show was well-heard and well-liked by people who would wait for it and for the nationalistic songs in it -- it has an attractive presentation -- but more was necessary. So I went to ARCPA and I was very excited about the oral history project. I was surprised that this work had not been done before, especially the aspect of its orientation toward creating a teaching manual. I know from experience with my our children -- with whom I always try to talk about our original village and country, and our customs and grandparents -- I know that despite [that kind of talk] the issue of one's background remains very limited if there is no interaction with it. Especially for children in private schools, if there is no book to read in, something attractive to look at, you feel that their belonging is tied up in the intellectual orientation that their school is directing them towards. For example, they grow up knowing well *Kuluna lil-Watan* [the Lebanese national anthem] and Independence Day [again, for Lebanon]. Through the school they learn these



things. But when I started working on oral history at home, the children became very interested, as they heard me transcribe cassettes and playback songs and tales about the homeland -- those are things that really pull



a child in. Also, when I entered houses to do the interviews, I sensed a real thirst to talk. The old men would all say, "Where were you before? Why are you coming now, fifty years later?"

They were right to compare us with the Zionists, who had so quickly responded to their tragedy, but I felt that it was important the oral history work reach the younger generation, even if it is late. The older generation lived Palestine and its history; even if it is now only a dream to them, they did live it. But if we were to continue this way, and nothing of Palestine were to reach the new generation, we might not last even another twenty years. Maybe in ten years if you were to ask a child, "Where are you from?" he would reply, "From Sidon," "From 'Ain el-Helweh." The original places in Palestine would no longer mean the same to them anymore. So this project constitutes a doorway, and entry to get people involved, especially the younger generation, through an educational book.

Kirsten: Two questions come out of what you've told us. First, when you did the section in your

radio program on Palestinian history, where did you get your information?

Bushra: I had several resources. Firstly, I relied on the Palestinian Encyclopedia. As to the history of world Zionism, I have a collection of books. "Lost We Forget," was also based on the Encyclopedia, in addition to the interviews I personally did about each village.

Kirsten: And did you feel that what you found in the Encyclopedia was sufficient?

Bushra: Yes, there was information on each village, how it was founded...but what

was really nice about the [radio] program was that I would try to pick villages whose inhabitants were now living here. This made people even more eager to listen, to hear about their own villages, if not this broadcast, then maybe the next.

Kirsten: You would get responses from people? Bushra: Yes, especially from the older generation. They really enjoyed it. And at times when we had to stop the program, they would call in and ask, "Why did you stop it?" So I would start it up again, with changes.

Kirsten: In your opinion, why were the older generations the most interested?

Bushra: Well, as far as they're concerned, you're representing their feelings directly. When you go back and re-open old wounds and the present is the past still continuing, you give them a kind of hope. Especially during the Intifada period, and even afterward, with Madrid and Oslo...when hope began to fade, particularly hope for the right of return....

Kirsten: What difficulties did you find in your work?

Bushra: The entry, I mean, entering the house, choosing the family well, seeing what you want from the family. The work involved getting recollections of events and autobiographies. For this you have to create a certain atmosphere for the narrator to take him back gradually to his childhood and youth, the period of the *hijra*, and how he lived each event at its time. You need to get him to give you stories that happened personally to him, troubles he went through. This is by no means an easy task. Try and get me or you to remember back ten years, and we might not speak facts anymore. But for them, what helped, is that they what they were recounting was tied to their daily lives at present. I mean, I know one woman with whom I did an interview; in her daily normal life anything you talk to her about immediately takes her back to Palestine. Why? Because the social situation is so different now, and so much for the worse, that she refuses the present and preserves her past as the reality. She still keeps the things that she had from her days when she was living in Palestine, and she will gladly show them to you and talk about them. So the difficulty is getting a person back in time, putting them in the mood.

Kirsten: Was there anyone who refused?

Bushra: Well, I tried to choose my families well so that I wouldn't waste time. First we selected one narrator from each village. Then we went back and tried to talk to all elderly people. The younger ones I interviewed would occasionally begin to recount things that hadn't happened to them personally as if they had, but which in fact they had only heard about. For example, the son of an important village leader had heard about some stories so much, that he came to think he did them, but if you figure out his age, you'd know he could only have been four or five years old at the time. So the elderly were better narrators.

Kirsten: Did you encounter anyone who was surprised that you came to interview them about

the history of Palestine?

Bushra: Well, many at first wondered why we were doing this. But most felt that this was very, very important work. They'd say, "Bravo, it's good that you're doing this. The political organizations and leaders before you should have paid some attention...but if you are doing it, well bravo."

Ghina: Did you hear anything in the interviews that surprised you or was hard for you to believe?

Bushra: Yes, there was one woman who had lots of rich experiences, and among them she'd participated in an battle. It happened in Loubia village. At one point she was leading the men and she was getting them all psyched up, and suddenly the men found themselves in the middle of a battle that they entered completely at her urging. She had a really strong personality. Another surprising thing was the women, who despite their lack of education, had an amazingly important role in the old days. The women had full days, working in the house, outside, making food for the revolutionaries, gathering supplies, etc. And there are women who took part in battles or would carry the

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a dream to them, they did live it.

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supplies on their heads. I think their role was even larger in the *hijra* period, when the men were still in denial and disbelief, especially as many of them had been land-owners. The women were the ones who went out and got jobs, got food, and didn't complain. This really surprised me.

The first thing we'd do when we entered a house for an interview was ask about their children. I was always amazed by how successful the children had become: this one's a doctor, this one a lawyer or engineer, that one has a Ph.D., in environmental studies and lives in America. This, despite the fact that the parents never had very good jobs at all. I mean,



Rights in History are a general concept; they can be falsified or counterfeited. But people's emotions, when they are spoken truthfully and emotionally to you, and when you are told the same story over and over from so many different sources, lead you to a different conclusion. Then you feel a real difference between oral history and standard history



imagine the sacrifice they had made, to say, "I'll weave baskets, or whatever, just so I can have an income until my children get through school." Most people nowadays, if they don't like the work, they just close up shop and do nothing. Or

they believe that a person has to be something himself in order to raise kids who amount to something. They complain that they can't afford to put their kids into schools -- but in those days, nobody was able to!

Kirsten: Did your work in this oral history project change your understanding of Palestinian history at all?

Bushra: Well, you see, I had studied the history to a large extent. But the human side, the emotional side of the story only came to me through this work. I mean, history presents to you the idea that in general people all have rights, but oral history presents those rights to you, before your very eyes. You see, for example, the key that a woman carried from her house and hasn't let go of to this day, or pottery or embroidery pieces that are still preserved. Rights are all embodied for you when you ask, "Why didn't you bring all your things with you?" and they say, "We thought we were going away for only ten days or so, and then we were going to return." When somebody tells you he planned to return, that means he still has a right to the land there. Rights in History are a general concept; they can be falsified or counterfeited. But people's emotions, when they are spoken truthfully and emotionally to you, and when you are told the same story over and over from so many different sources, lead you to a different conclusion. Then you feel a real difference between oral history and standard history. You realize people's connections, and you believe them more deeply. And when you see that they still sing the same songs, wear the same clothes, keep their ways and habits, then you see that truly they don't want to change, that they just want to go back.

Kirsten: Did you find that people were willing only to talk about the positive things in their past?

Bushra: No, once they got sucked into recalling a story after hours of continuous, day-by-day recollection, some people would forget themselves and begin to talk about the problems

in the family structure, in tribal relations. But they would try to sum it up by saying, "Despite this, we were happy. We were all guaranteed a good life. True, it was a simple life, but never would we abandon someone." They would then focus on the cooperation and not the problems that were certainly there. Collaborators, people who sold land -- these were discussed. But they would emphasize then that the real sellers were not peasants living there among them but absentee land-owners such as the Tuenis or the Sursocks living in Beirut. Those were the negative things that were discussed.

Ghina: How much did you feel they were telling you what they wished were true, and how much really was reliable recollection?

Bushra: It was basically reliable. When important events were recorded similarly in different places by different members of the field-team, then you knew there were actual facts being recalled.

Kirsten: Did you find people who did not wish to talk about the negative aspects of Palestinian history?

Bushra: Certainly. There was, for example, one woman whom I would ask about such things, and she would simply refuse to answer by saying, "Our country is big, and there are people still living there" whom she didn't want to hurt.

Kirsten: Did you find anyone eager to talk about problems from that period?

Bushra: Well, revolutionaries would get excited to tell that so-and-so betrayed us or sold the land. They'd talk about the issue of collaboration. But the hardest thing to talk about for the men, to our great surprise, was their childhood. When we'd ask, "What did you used to play with as a child?" They'd say, "I was never a child, not me. When I was six I'd be going everyday to the fields, etc. We weren't children." The same for women. They all wanted to tell us that they had feelings of responsibility from their earliest years. There were some who felt it was insulting to say they had ever played. One told us that as a boy of

only seven he carried a gun taller than himself. Perhaps this talk constituted a kind of compensation for them for something that is gone.



But the hardest thing to talk about for the elders, to our great surprise, was their childhood.



Another thing we discovered through this oral testimony collection is that there were many massacres that occurred and have never been documented, for example, the massacre of Safsaf. We talked to one survivor who was telling us about a massacre and we didn't know where he meant it had taken place. So he pulled out a paper and showed us that he had written, very carefully and neatly, the full name of each man killed-- personal, father's grandfather's, and family names all. There were many such events. Perhaps had the oral history project been done in 1948, when more people remembered more clearly, when more people were still alive, many more things could have been revealed and would have been believed.

Kirsten: What are the things that you think should go into a history of Palestine?

Bushra: I think every event should be recorded in oral history manner, at the time of its occurrence. Whether it gets put into a big reference book later, that's another issue, but the recording should be done for everything. I mean, we all remember well what happened in Sabra and Shateela, but there are people now who are trying to erase it from our memories and to give the younger generation a completely different understanding of what happened. So, now there are people who lived through the



massacres and are no longer certain of what they saw -- so how will they pass their testimonies on to the coming generation? What it comes down to is, you're either stupid or you're pretending to be stupid, and each case is worse than the other.



Interviewee: Jaber Abu Hawash
Provenance: Haifa, Al-Tirah
Date & Place of Interview: Dec. 27, 1997, Tyre

Ghina: First of all, we'd like to know how you began this work? How did you decide to work on this project?

Jaber: I began working with the Center on several projects, one of them this one. But it became clear to me that this was the most important one. Why? Because, basically, you can say that the period we're living in now is one of struggle. At first the struggle was military but now it's transformed to cultural-economic. The most important aspect of the cultural struggle is the struggle for the preservation of the national identity, which the Zionists are trying to steal from us. For this reason, I had a strong motive which was that this is nationalist



At first the struggle was military but now it's transformed to cultural-economic. The most important aspect of the cultural struggle is the struggle for the preservation of the national identity.



work. Because, certainly, these elders, everyday, one of them passes away. Each time an elder dies, the [collective] memory is lessened, that of the *nakbe*, the uprooting, the land, the deprivation, and the injustice. That was my reason to be motivated to work on this, and, thanks be to God, we were successful in conducting many interviews. There was a lot of cooperation from people.

Kirsten: You're saying, "Thanks be to God." Does that mean that in the beginning you had some doubt about the feasibility of the methods?

Jaber: No, I trusted the Center's people and methods. But I felt that the work would certainly be tiring, getting people to go back in time, and often to sad things, so that's what made me so thankful that people were compliant -- that the elderly were willing and able, treating me as one of their grandchildren, and that there was mutual trust. Thanks be to God.

Kirsten: So how did you develop that mutual trust?

Jaber: Through my work. I worked on several projects, for example the folklore collection project, before this one and they gave people confidence in me.

Kirsten: Was it important, in your opinion, that you worked first on folklore?

Jaber: Definitely. The folklore project gave me a sense of how to enter people's houses, how to conduct interviews, what questions to ask, what difficulties one might face. Each project improves on the last.

Kirsten: Was it easier to ask people to give you songs and stories than it was to ask for experiences from 1948?

Jaber: No. The first project was much harder, because it was limited to songs and stories and not all people can recall these things, whereas everyone had a personal experience with 1948.

Kirsten: And everyone was willing to relate that experience?

Jaber: Oh yes, after the goals of the project

were explained and who was going to benefit. Then interviewees were obliging because they found themselves participating in a activity taking place on the ground and dealing with a topic previously untouched.

Kirsten: So even though it was a previously ignored issue, no one was surprised when you came to interview them about it?

Jaber: On the contrary, they would ask, "Why are you gathering this information?" etc. But through the method of oral history, they would eventually comply. I had no problems with the elders, but the younger generation would sometimes give me trouble. There was one young guy, I was interviewing his grandfather, and he saw a word written on my question list -- "Israel." Now, due to his specific ideological leanings, he was provoked by this word, and that created a problem of understanding. We were able to work it out, however. [Editor: Actually, blows were exchanged before the interview was resumed.]

Kirsten: Through this work, was your understanding of the history of Palestine changed?

Jaber: Most certainly. I did have a background understanding going into the project, and an intellectual take on it, both of which allowed me to undertake this work, but during this project I gained new information and experience. My information was widened, and moreover, I benefited from hearing from a variety of sources that I hadn't been exposed to before personally.

Ghina: Was there anything specific that you wouldn't have known had you not partaken in this project?

Jaber: Yes, much, such as the go-betweens who sold [Palestinian] land [to the Jews]. Before I had thought that it was the Palestinians themselves who sold the land, but in several interviews it was made clear to me that it was not the Palestinians who sold the land but non-Palestinian people who were living in Palestine because it was a central location and rich, who

decided to sell portions of the land. The Palestinian people became aware of this problem and did something about it by forming a watch-dog group, The Red Glove Organization. For that reason, most people



My information was widened, and moreover, I benefited from hearing from a variety of sources that I hadn't been exposed to before personally.



were afraid to sell. So I arrived at the conclusion that it wasn't the people living in their homes and cultivating the land who did the selling -- they weren't the source of that people's defeat. Rather there were conspiracies by the powerful nations, and Arab ones, too.

Ghina: This was an important change. Anything else?

Jaber: Other issues...for example, I believe in a certain ideology, and [I found out that] that ideology was present in the minds of Palestinians before 1948 as well. It existed. I was surprised. There was a village called Deir al-Asad, for example, that was organized according to Socialist principles!

Kirsten: Did you learn anything new about the woman's role through your work?

Jaber: Oh certainly. From, take for example the women with whom we did the follow-up interviews, and many others, I learned that the woman had a big role in supporting the revolution and maintaining the house, creating a consciousness -- in all such things, she participated with the man.



Kirsten: Before you began the work, did you have a list of people you knew you should interview, or how did you select people?

Jaber: From my first experience, I became able to know who could be helpful and who not, who had a strong memory and could benefit the oral history project. I looked for people from



diverse towns and villages, and likewise, I looked for people with various backgrounds and customs: the urban people differ in their ways from the peasants, and so on. This gave me a specific list of people to see.

Ghina: If you could go back, are there things you would change in your work-method?

Jaber: I found my work-method to be the most successful, because it got me to my desired goals.

Ghina: Were there any mistakes you discovered?

Jaber: Of course. For example, I mean, in regards to setting a time for the interview -- it plays a big role. I mean sometimes I'd go in the afternoon, and find people busy. So I came to know that I should go either in the morning or the evening, when people would be more relaxed and receiving. Also, another mistake I found was in asking questions -- making the questions clear to the interviewee, who is not always an

intellectual.

Ghina: Whom did you find easier to interview, the intellectuals or the regular people?

Jaber: The regular people, by far, because they would respond in a way that was not artificial but emotional.

Kirsten: Did you ever feel that people were giving you an answer they supposed you wanted to hear, or did you feel that people were generally honest?

Jaber: Honesty is a given. But sometimes, because the people were advanced in age, they'd be answering one question and slip into another topic. And here you had to use good interviewing

skills to cleverly re-ask the question.

Ghina: Okay, you made a comparison between intellectuals and non-intellectuals in how they responded, could you do the same for men and women?

Jaber: Yes, for example in regards to emotion. Emotion always dominates women than men. For that reason, emotional issues always entered into the interviews I held with women. It was easy for their eyes to tear and for them to cry, etc. So the interviews with them were more psychological in direction.

Ghina: We saw several men whose eyes got teary.

Jaber: This was also true of some men, but most of the emotional responses came from women.

Ghina: Hmmm.

Jaber: And then, the women were more cooperative than the men. They talked more

easily.

Ghina: So, were there points that women would focus on that were different from the men's focal points?

Jaber: Definitely. I mean, the men would focus on the heroic acts, on the things done by specific people. "I did; I acted; I was this and that..." Their talk would extol their heroic deeds. And they would concentrate on the positive things more than negatives; I mean, they would hide the negatives. And also, the men would talk about economic things more than the women. But here I return to my original idea, that women would talk in a way that was emotional, domestic, and had to do with raising children and running a household, etc. I mean, the women would not praise her own heroic acts to the degree that the man did. And for that reason, she would have more honesty than the man.

Ghina: One senses from your talk -- I don't know if this is true -- that you enjoyed your interviews with women more than those with men.

Jaber: Certainly. Certainly. I mean, I'd feel myself to be like a child when I was sitting before this old woman, as if I were a child listening to my grandmother tell me stories, her

story. I enjoyed her talk and likewise the information she was giving me. I would come to feel an instinctive, emotional side in myself, and the nationalist spirit would pull me, giving me a more national fervor.

Ghina: You're talking about in relation to the woman?

Jaber: Yes the woman. But in relation to the man, there was more exaggeration in the talk. They would praise heroic deeds a lot, and talk a lot about battles, and not about experiences that took place on the ground. Because, perhaps, the woman is more perceptive of the problems that households and even village communities suffer. There was a big move to marginalize the woman in that period. It's true that she participated and had her role, but there was marginalization, to a large degree.

Ghina: You felt that from their talk with you?

Jaber: Oh yes. For example, take education; they would concentrate on the boy's education more than on the girl's. And so on.

Ghina: Did women complain about such things, or did they just mention it in passing?

Jaber: They would register their complaints in an emotional manner: "Wallaah, I wanted to go to school, but my father wouldn't let me!"





Bushra Al-Mughalib presents ARCPA's *Key to Submission* AM Al-Ram, Sidon, 12/25/01

"THIS ILLITERATE WOMAN, SHE TALKED TO US":

A Summary and Evaluation



By Kireten Scheid

After two years of collecting oral testimonies from Palestinian refugees in Lebanon about their experiences of the uprooting in 1948, ARCPA decided to conduct follow-up interviews to determine the importance of oral history collection for the people who participated in the project. We wanted to know what affect the interview experience had had on narrators in several emotional and psychological areas. Also, we wanted to find out from the participants what their hopes for the project were so we could evaluate our own efforts.*

Based on our readings in oral history work, we hoped to find that the interview experience had empowered the narrators, by emphasizing the importance of their life-long belonging in the Palestinian community and their personal experiences of its history. This type of emphasis was meant to off-set the standard prizing of formal learning, which usually denies the peasant-origin refugees much importance in an understanding of their own national history. In particular, we wondered if men and women would deal with the role of narrator differently. Would women who aren't generally treated as holders of knowledge feel awkward as informants? It had been posited that oral testimony creates a "powerful textual affirmation of the speaking subject." (John Beverly, see citation in our Further Reading section) so we wondered how strongly Palestinian testifiers of both sexes felt that affirmation after the interview ended. Did it indeed increase the interviewees' sense of self-worth, of commitment to a cause, of confidence in the goals' worthiness and eventual attainability?

Further, it has been asserted that oral history as an activity brings to life a community character or corporate group spirit. Did the interview experience create or heighten that sense of engagement in a corporate-group's well-being? If so, what importance could this spirit have for a people who now find themselves so firmly excluded from the political and social future? Does oral testimony collection

indeed mark and affirm a will to not be muted or defeated, as some oral historians have suggested? If so, why did the participants decide to help us by being interviewed and what victory did they hope would result from their decision?

Finally, we wondered to what extent our work remained trapped in the standards of normal social discourse for Palestinians, and thus, to what extent was it rendered unable to offer anything new to our common understanding of Palestinian history? Oral history was designed as a data-collecting medium to be capable of gleaming more personal details of life than standard, document-based history normally gleams. It has been argued that oral testimony is a moment when one person's voice transgresses the normal boundary between public and private spheres to create a new kind of "public intimacy." Such a new realm for knowledge could indeed ameliorate our understanding of what happened to Palestinians in 1948 and how they coped -- so were we successful? Did the participants feel that in narrating they were able to revise the national history? Were they willing in this context to tell about aspects of social life that in everyday Palestinian conversation are hushed?

To provoke answers to our questions, we decided to ask interviewees about their initial reaction to the request for an interview on the topic of the 1948 uprooting: were they surprised, pleased, angered? Was this a story they often told or usually left untouched? Was there anything they thought they had buried in the oblivion of the past that came back to light during the interview? Were any memories painful or disturbing to recount? Were there some things simply best left unsaid? What does one do with the negative aspects of Palestinian history? Indeed, in their opinion what does constitute Palestinian history, and did the interview experience change that for them at all? What was their motive in agreeing to be interviewed? And finally, what did they hope for in response from the readers of their interviews?

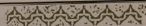
Our follow-up interviews did offer some noteworthy surprises, all of which should be seen in the particular context provided by the 1948 uprooting experience, an event that for the refugees is the defining moment of their national history. First, no one indicated any surprise at being asked for an interview on this topic. All treated it as a natural request, although only two had ever been approached before at the institutional level. All said they told their stories of exile to their children and grandchildren regularly, and were always willing to do so. Beyond that, some expressed happiness at this opportunity to talk -- one woman saying her chest and spirit were "opened" by the request -- while others were obliging but disturbed that it took so long, nearly half a century, for anyone finally to come to them.

No one admitted to having forgotten anything, and indeed the question was treated as a potential threat to the person's worthiness as a testifier. The Freudian concept of repression was not present in their understanding of this question, and most people answered by affirming their ability to remember and their truthfulness in recounting the period's events. Only one man, the survivor of a formerly undocumented massacre, treated the interview as a time to reflect upon his previous silence,



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explaining that having been one of only two spared such a horrible fate, he "lowered his head like a duck" and kept quiet even after coming to Lebanon. Further, he declared that such silence was general: "No one said a thing, figuring that it was all over: they ate our country and so it was over. No one thought there was any future, that was the general opinion..."

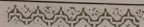
Although the tones adopted by the interviewees for the follow-up interview ranged from didactic to playful, from boastful to humble, there was little insertion of a personal voice. There was basically little departure from an apparently standard understanding of what constitutes Palestinian history: wars, heroic masculine acts, and collective oppression. For all, it seems that they saw the interview as a duty, a national duty, to inform and clarify to Western understanding what happened to the Palestinians in 1948 and why their current exile is so unjust and intolerable. This message guided the interviews and led the respondents to treat the history they discussed from the viewpoint of personal belonging as a sacred, impersonal entity. In part, this is a standard trait of oral testimony, to feature an "I" that refers neither to an individual with a destiny (as in a novel) nor to an individual with acute observation skills (as in an ethnography), but rather to an individual who has taken it upon him or herself to represent through participation an entire group, to personify a society. But perhaps given the gravity of the subject discussed, this trait was exaggerated and made dominant in a way it would not have been had the interview dealt instead with folk tales or culinary customs. In this sense, the details of private, interior lives and imaginations were not brought to the fore by our oral history work, at least not in regards to the topic of the 1948 uprooting.

Similarly, our questions probing into the area of personal feelings were almost universally disregarded or impersonally answered. So much so, that two men, confronted by our continual emphasis on how they had experienced the interview, repeatedly encouraged us, "Any questions you want to ask, ask me. I'm a source of all information," and "Ask, ask me, what do you want to ask?" It was as if the two men were saying that these other issues were not the subject of proper questions. One man agreed that remembering his parents always brought tears to eyes, but this attitude did not carry over into his recounting of historical events. Again, only the massacre survivor and his wife asserted that recounting the memories was actually painful. While others allowed at most that "naturally, remembering leaving one's house and land is disturbing," the survivor said that during the interview he felt "he might go and cry," and his wife declared that just listening to him recollect made her "get a tight feeling all over, her heart pound, and her chest shake." One elder asserted that nothing disturbs him, but his retelling of how he and his wife decide to leave Palestine, for the sake of the children, broke off with a low murmur of "There is no god but God...." The silence following that statement was pregnant with emotion.

However, these interviews could also prompt a reconsideration of what kind of emotion was sought with the oral testimony method. First, readers who do not share the interviewees' socio-cultural background may have to develop a land-base way of hearing emotion. In other words, for peasants whose identity, social status, and self-images were tied up in their ownership and cultivation of land,



These interviews could also prompt a reconsideration of what kind of emotion was sought with the oral testimony method. Emotion can also be collective, not only personal, and oral testimony highlights this collective aspect of the experience of emotion.



to talk about loss of land is to talk about loss of identity and dignity. Secondly, recently, anthropologists have begun to challenge the Western Freudian concept of emotion as a properly individual trait. Emotion can also be collective, not only personal, and oral testimony that puts the narrator in the position of representing the community certainly highlights this collective aspect of the experience of emotion. The collectivity that each interviewee was narrating was personally experienced, in the course of the interviews and in the course of their daily lives' interaction with their host society. They are continually told, "You are Palestinian. You do not have this right. We expect this of you." So for the Palestinian refugee situation, it seems oral testimony provides a bridge between personal and collective emotional responses, something like the "public intimacy" that has been found in other oral testimony contexts. To traverse this bridge and glean a better understanding of the refugees' experiences, we must challenge our previous notions of emotion and identity.

Theoretically, oral testimony offers narrators a chance to "challenge the loss of authority or orality and the processes of cultural modernization that privilege literacy," in John Beverly's words. This means that the interviewees for oral history projects should be able to dispute the grand historical narratives which tidily tell the history of a whole people and overlook the diverse contributions and experiences of its many participants. The opportunity, however, was not capitalized upon, at least not knowingly, by the people we interviewed. They treated the oral history of Palestine as a yet unwritten history, but not as a genre contrary to the normal conventions of history-writing. Battles, heroes, land gains and losses were uniformly highlighted, regardless of the narrator's gender. Personal decision-making processes, emotional responses, and intra-family differences were not revealed in general, and where they came up in passing, they were not treated as part of the overall message. When such matters were explicitly asked after, they were treated by narrators as irrelevant to a proper understanding of Palestinian history. Also, only two of the people interviewed allowed that negative aspects of Palestinian history -- i.e. Palestinian collaboration, sexism, social oppression, vanguard leadership -- should be included in an official accounting.

Therefore, it seems that at least for the history of uprooting, this oral testimony collection may add new details but will not, in general, change the direction of what the Palestinian refugees have been saying all along. The commonly described motives, the blame allotted to supporters' treason, and the tone of incredulity will not be altered, at least not to the minds of the testifiers. Given that unanimously the interviewees said their motive in participating was to clarify the West's understanding of why they became refugees, perhaps it is understandable that no one cared or dared, in the context of these interviews, to call into question the main premises of the national history. Their aim, as they stated it, was conservative, to resurrect and promote a neglected voice, and in this the oral history collection project accomplished their goals. Furthermore, all the respondents felt that the interviews should be translated and published in English for broader publication. As to what readers, especially first-world audiences, should do after having read their interviews, they all said, "side with the Palestinians," "know that we are a wronged group," "have sympathy for us and solve this problem."

* My thanks to the following for their insightful responses to this essay: Rosemary Sayigh, Suhair al-'Azam, Ghina Imad, and Randa Abu Moghayyel.

Imm Nafidh's Story of the Hijra

At the time of the hijra, I had five children [recites their names]. It was very hard. If only we died on the garbage heaps of our country rather than coming here. My late brother said, "I know a Christian woman in Lebanon" -- may God make happy your evenings and her evenings! I didn't know her.

My brother's wife was with me -- we were many women. It was pouring rain and my children, *haram*, were shivering; they were cold. We came upon a woman at the beginning of Rimaysh. I said to her, "Ya *khalhi*, where is Imm Elias?" She said, "Which Imm Elias?" I was angry; I said, "How do I know which Imm Elias?" She said, "There are many Imm Eliases."

I went on walking, *haram*, with those children. We met a man on the road, and the rain was rolling over us. He asked me, "Where are you from, *hajji*?" I said, "We're from Sha' b." He said, "Follow me; I'll show you *bayt Ma' toaq*." What did I care, *Ma' toaq* or not *Ma' toaq*; I just wanted to get those children in bed!

We walked; we reached the door of a house. He called, "Ya Imm Elias!" When I heard the name Imm Elias, my heart opened. I thought, maybe this is my brother's friend. She answered, "Who is it?" He said, "Come out and see this pitiful sight!" She said, "From where?" He said, "From Sha' b."

She said, "Ya *hala*, ya *hala*, ya *meet ahan wa sahan*. Anyone who comes from Sha' b comes from Abu al-'Abd." She started undressing the children, taking their clothes -- they were drenched in rain -- and putting them in dry ones. All the people who had left [Sha' b] with me were with her.

She lit a fire in the *mauqada*; she lit in the *kanan*; she lit a fire in the *mastaba*. She wanted to warm these people up. She dressed the children in her grandchildren's clothes, and she took off her own clothes for me. We slept that night in her house.

The very next day, *ya habeebat salaami*, some of our relatives came; they came to ask about their wives. They said to Nafidh [her eldest son], "Do you want to see your father?" Nafidh cried. He said, "Where is my father? He's dead!" The man said, "No, my nephew. Come, I'll take you to your father. From the day he arrived in Lebanon he's been waiting in the coffee house. Everyone who comes, he buys them food so that God may send his children people who will take care of them."

The result, *ya habeebat 'albi*, he [the relative] took him [Nafidh]. A car came, *wallahi*. Abu Nafidh was just about to leave; he had one leg in the car and one leg on the ground. The man shouted, "Abu Nafidh!" He turned around. He [the man] said, "Here's Nafidh!" Abu Nafidh said, "Silence, man! Don't make me suffer! God knows on what road Nafidh died?" Nafidh shouted, "Where I am, Babel. Here I am!" They hugged each other with a big hug. Then they came together to where he was. When he saw us, they cried. There were thirty-five of us, children and women, and...how shall I tell you?

In the end, *habibat 'albi*, he went and brought food and told me to distribute it to everyone. He bought cheese; he bought olives; he bought bread. He said, "Distribute it to everyone." He gave in gratitude because his children were alive.

Note: Imm Nafidh was born in 1912 in the village of Sha' b, and she married in 1930. Her husband had been a railway worker which is probably why he had cash with him to buy food. This story was recorded by Rosemary Sayigh on May 17, 1992. Translation by Rosemary Sayigh.

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Back Issues Available in Arabic:

Al-Jana Al-Arabi #5, July 1997

Articles:

- * *Palestine As Remembered by the "Shaikh" of Popular Literature in Lebanon*, Salom Al-Razi
- * *Mahmoud Dakwar's Collection: An Ethnographic museum for the Palestinian collective memory*
- * *The Instrument of Abundance, "Al-Arghul"*
- * *Learning with Cultural Heritage: Textbooks on Palestinian Folk tales and songs*
- * *NSO Profile: The National Institute for Social Care and Training/ Beit Atfal As-Sumud*

PALESTINIAN ORAL HISTORY FILE:

- * *Remembering the Near East Broadcasting Station in Pre-1948 Palestine (Part 2)*

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* THE USE OF ORAL HISTORY IN ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

Mea'az El-Djani

Oral history is a method whose use is not limited to historians, but rather, one which can be the basis for activities in which both educators and adolescents participate, in schools, cultural clubs, or the like. Based on this understanding of oral history, ARCPA held in 1992 a training session and year-long series of activities for NGO facilitators and Nahr al-Bared refugee camp children that drew on both active learning techniques and oral history collection. The topic addressed by these children and facilitators was the 1948 Uprooting from Palestine.

The goal of the many activities was to prompt the rising generation to relive first-hand an important historical experience and in the process to benefit from the knowledge and personal experiences of their elders. Thus, the activities were designed 1) to form a vehicle for an inter-generational exchange of knowledge, and 2) to encourage children's consciousness of their elders' experiences and then record and convey this consciousness in their own language to other children and the community at large. In this way, the activity would further promote cooperation among the larger community in the discovery of an extremely rich popular cultural stock of knowledge.

Preparatory Steps:

- 1) Acquaintance with educational drama theory and its actual application.
- 2) Acquaintance with Active Learning procedures and demonstration of several exemplary activities.
- 3) Selection of the topic to be dealt with, in this case, the 1948 Exodus.

Following these three preparatory steps, the participating educators undertook their own field research, recording the oral testimonies of elders resident in Nahr al-Bared about their experiences of the 1948 Exodus. These educators work as facilitators in a number of social and public associations in the Nahr al-Bared camp.

Each participant collected information about his or her own village of origin. The field collection period lasted approximately six months. During this time print, audio and visual materials that dealt with the chosen topic were also collected by ARCPA.

Out of this research period a dramatic scenario was developed by the participants to be carried out in the following phase with the children. This scenario, calling on the research contributions of all the participating educators, was collectively developed, in accordance with the Active Learning method. Active Learning is an educational procedure that incites children through situational drama to undertake their own research, make decisions, and solve problems. The collectively produced scenario may be seen as a dramatic fabric clothing the participating children in roles and putting period tools in their hands, so as to enable the children to enter the selected topic and engage with it in an active,



The facilitator meet at ARCPA to select the topic.

imaginative, and uninhibited manner – that which is most conducive to learning. The children are then asked to express what they have learned in any of a number of expressive means – writing, drawing, music, dance or theater – so that their learning will be accompanied by practice and pleasure. Furthermore, this educational procedure advances the children's analytical and critical skills in the process of research and relived experience. Thus all in all, Active Learning leads to the development of a generation of youth that is aware, active, and takes pleasure in learning.

After the scenario was agreed upon, historical costumes were gathered, as well as antique tools that has been carried from Palestine at the time of the 1948 uprooting and preserved by exiled families.

Execution:

The execution of the 1948 Exile project took place in several phases. The first involved entering the children imaginatively into the uprooting experience through the planned dramatic encounter. The 30-some participating children, between the ages of 10 and 13, were gathered from the camp and transported to a forest in Akkar, Lebanon's northernmost province. There the children were seated in a ring beneath the trees with the activity coordinator. While the facilitators took their places out of sight of the children for the dramatic scenario in the woods, the coordinator began a dialogue with the children that was started by his asking their names and the names of the villages from which their families had emigrated. He then asked why they were here in Lebanon, how and why their departure from Palestine had taken place, and what events had surrounded the departure.

Once it was clear that the children had gotten into the spirit of the topic, the coordinator coughed, in a sign to the facilitators for one of them to make an entrance into the ring, after creeping up through the trees. The selected facilitator appeared wearing historically appropriate village dress and carrying an antique gun. He greeted the children and asked for a drink of water, saying he was tired, and introduced himself as Abu Mohammed.

Next Abu Mohammed asked the children if anyone had seen his mother and brothers who had also left their home village, Safouria, yesterday, during shelling, with the rest of the women and children. Today, after the depletion of the resistance fighters' supplies and the entry of the Zionists into the village in armored cars, the remaining fighters had fled. So, he told them, here he was, looking for his family, because some of the villagers had told him that they might be here, in this forest in Southern Lebanon.

This encounter with Abu Mohammed formed an element of dramatic surprise that immediately transported the children back to South Lebanon year 1948. So engaged, the children quickly volunteered to help Abu Mohammed in his search for his family. During their search they encountered further dramatic personas hidden in the woods, men and women emigrants from al-Ghabbiyyeh and Sa'aa villages. Upon meeting them the children would ask if they were Abu Mohammed's family



The children listen to the *kyra* story of a family from Sa'aa.

or had seen them. In reply, they would receive from each yet another personal story of the mass emigration. And so a series of discoveries of more emigrated groups – one from Safad, a second from Diahm, a third from al-Safat – took place and in each case produced a moment of interaction between the children and the stories and problems narrated to them by the refugees.

After continuous search in the forest, Abu Mohammed's family was finally found. The meeting was by then moving for everyone.

The first day finished with the return of the children to the camp. They were asked to gather from their own families the stories of their departure and to meet again in one week. Thus began the second phase of the activity.

At the second meeting, the stories collected by the children were heard by all. Then the children were told that they were now journalists and divided into three working groups. Each group undertook to create a wall-newspaper that would deal with the experience of the 1948 emigration. Following this, a discussion took place and a film was shown to offer additional information to the journalists about the people and land of Palestine. Each journalist group then visited the library that had been prepared by the facilitators where a librarian presented the journalists with an exhibit of pictures of the uprooting events. Then the journalists explored on their own the library's archives of articles, pictures, stamps, coins, clothing, tools...etc. Printed materials were borrowed by the journalists for their use in writing their newspapers. The newspapers created included drawings of the events, essays about their experiences in the woods, information about the mass emigration, cartoons, copies of photographs, and so on. Two days were devoted to producing the newspapers.



The journalists use the librarian's exhibit.



Drawings, news information and statistics, cartoons, and photographs are collected by the journalists and incorporated into their newspapers.

After the newspapers' completion, the children were asked to develop their own dramatic play about the 1948 uprooting. As they did so, the activity coordinator encouraged the children to listen to each other's opinions and respect their differences. Story elements were accumulated and linked through a process of mutual listening and persuasion. The result was a most moving and realistic story.

Exhibition:

Similar activities dealing with the Intifada had been held simultaneously in al-Badawi camp, also under the guidance of ARCPA. So upon the closing of these two projects, both sets of participants met

A young journalist in period dress explains to her friends the things she has learned from this Active Learning project. Badawi has a well-known paper; she has helped create it called The Opened Island.



and together organized a single exhibition which opened at the Moustafa Sha'ban School, in Nahr al-Bared, on November 29, 1992. Families, institutions, and other children were invited to the exhibition where they were met by the participating facilitators and children who explained the projects to them with the aid of the pictures, tools, and wall-newspapers. Accompanying the exhibition were a play and a *dzabkeh* dance performed by the children.

One of the most beautiful features of the exhibition was the expressions on the faces of the families as they looked at and listened to their children's experiences. For before their very own eyes their children were transforming themselves into the bearers of an educational activity, rich with lessons for the present and the future.



The participants - children, facilitators, and coordinators - gather for a group photo to conclude their transformational experience.



CURRENT AND FUTURE PROJECTS AT ARCPA

If you have enjoyed reading about ARCPA's past activities, please allow us to take this opportunity to tell you more about our center. But first, a word about the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon. While so much of the world focuses on the difficulties confronting Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the truly dire situation of the Palestinian Diaspora in Lebanon is virtually ignored and forgotten, as the ongoing difficulties with UNRWA have demonstrated. Poverty, illiteracy, health crises, and social problems are all on the rise among Palestinians here, following drastic cuts in aid, support, and protection by influential world organizations, Arab states, and, most distressingly, Palestinian national bodies.

In the face of this deepening human crisis, only a handful of institutions and individuals are mounting effective responses. ARCPA, a non-profit organization founded in 1990, is one such institution. We work to both impart skills and instill self-confidence in Palestinian children and youth through art activities and a creative pedagogical technique known as "active learning." ARCPA's approach is thus pro-active: we help young Palestinians to survive their present difficulties by equipping them with important skills such as critical thinking, imaginative problem-solving, effective interpersonal communication, creative expression. It is these skills which will enable them to successfully meet their future challenges. Further, ARCPA provides non-formal learning materials and programs to counteract the culturally impoverished environment of the camps and schools and to motivate these children to assume an active role in reestablishing their own and their community's sense of self-worth and identity.

"IMAGES AND TESTIMONIES FROM THE CAMPS: PALESTINIAN CHILDREN RECORD THEIR LIVES"

A multi-media educational project, "Images and Testimonies" will enable Palestinian refugee youths between the ages of 10 and 16, to work with an experienced film director, a professional photographer, and a team of educators, researchers, and artists to record, interpret, and comment upon the realities of their daily lives, their rights, and hopes for the future. The youths will be trained in oral testimony documentation by ARCPA staff, in professional video recording by Mai Masri, and in photography by Peter Fryer. This twin mode of documentation, in visual images and audio testimonies, will then be transformed by the youths with the guidance of Masri, El-Dajani, and educators into a series of video diaries, a textbook, and a 50-minute documentary. During this second stage, the youths will receive hands-on training in the technical aspects of video-editing, sound-dubbing, and on-line (for the video diaries) and layout, design, and printing (for the textbook), using the facilities of a multi-media lab to be set up at ARCPA with the assistance of multi-media artist Paul Mattar. At the conclusion, the youths will present to their communities and the world at large their tangible and unique creations reflecting their own ideas, values, hopes. The ARCPA team will later collaborate with educators led by Annette Cotterill, director of Learning Through Action, to create a teacher's manual for use in primary and secondary formal and informal educational contexts. The manual will focus on issues posed by the children's testimonies and engage young readers in researching first-hand and offering solutions to the problems facing young people in the refugee camps, such as school drop-out, child labor, physical handicaps, gender discrimination, ghettoization, and so on.

Given that Palestinian refugee youths' insights are generally unheard and have been unfortunately excluded thus far from the debate over the status of the Palestinian diaspora community, this project will achieve an important goal of injecting their voices into an international debate which will profoundly affect their futures, and whose democratic resolution cannot achieve long-term success without their active participation. Because the project emphasizes collaboration and hands-on learning, it will offer the youths valuable lessons in collective decision-making, budgeting, and interpersonal communication skills, exactly the skills necessary for enacting democracy on the ground. Further, the proposed project will afford Palestinian children a rare opportunity to learn more about their cultural heritage and

communal history and will thus illuminate the factors which have enabled this exiled community to survive half a century of hardships. Thus it will instill hope, while also imparting valuable skills, knowledge, and self-esteem to the youths as they participate in each stage of the project according to its pro-active pedagogical method. Moreover, it will encourage their creative and confident self-expression and result in multiple formats for sharing their experiences and views with a wide international audience, thus allowing the youth to participate as their own advocates in a broad social and political discourse of which they are usually the unconsidered objects.

"FAMILY MEMORIES":

A second oral-history project focusing on the experiences of Palestinian refugees' in Lebanon, this eighteen-month long program will stimulate Palestinian refugee children to interview their elders, record their memories, and collect family pictures, papers, and personal artifacts that can be reproduced in photo-essay format with accompanying diaries to document the affect this project has on the children's understanding of their social environment. Thus the project will work to combat the broadening generation gap that seriously threatens the displaced Palestinian community and promises to destroy the cultural mechanisms for passing on knowledge, skills, and sense of identity and self-esteem. Yet it is precisely these cultural resources that are most needed by Palestinian children as they grow up to face the challenges the future poses for them as members of a totally disenfranchised refugee community.

At the project's conclusion, a group of the participating youth will compile an educational book based on their diaries and photo-essays. Also, a traveling exhibition will be put together to allow the children to spread their learning to their larger communities. Along the same lines, they will collaborate on a drama based on their findings to be performed before community audiences.

The mental and psychological skills which this project will enhance include ability to undertake independent research, to think critically, to approach one's elders, and to see oneself as part of a community with a valuable cultural heritage.

ARCPA'S PUBLIC-ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES:

Library services in the following fields:

- 1) archives of folklore and oral history material collected by the ARCPA;
- 2) Arab popular arts history, craft design, and manual techniques;
- 3) feasibility studies and financial management of craft income-generating projects;
- 4) popular arts activities for youth using the "Learning Through Action" approach;
- 5) staff collection and recording of music, songs, folk tales and oral history.

A computer with Internet hook-up for accessing information about Palestinian cultural activities elsewhere in the Diaspora and in the Occupied Territories, and an Internet wall-newspaper

A multi-media lab for the production of publications and editing of videos

FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

ARCPA was founded on the basis of immense volunteer commitment. While we now employ a number of paid personnel, we remain independent of government or political funding. Our shoe-string budget is continuously strained. Thus, we are as dependent as ever upon the gracious donations of concerned individuals and organizations.

HOW TO ASSIST IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ARCPA'S GOALS:

If you wish to assist us, please mark an "X" next to the area of assistance you prefer, supply the information requested at the bottom, and return this form with your check to ARCPA in the enclosed envelope.

Technical and Facility Assistance:

- ☐ * Can you hold a workshop on skills such as oral history collection, effective Internet use, homepage design, electronic magazine production, or multi-media indexing?
- ☐ * Can you offer volunteer time to train our staff and that of other NGOs in English?
- ☐ * Can you offer library materials on oral history collection or Palestinian culture?
- ☐ * Can you supply us with cabinets for storage of our cassette archives?

Networking Assistance:

- ☐ * Can you help us to identify other organizations and resource people involved in similar efforts with whom we might set up an information exchange system?
- ☐ * Do you know of individuals who may be interested in our work?

Financial Assistance:

- ☐ * \$10 buys a pack of audio cassettes to record folk music or oral history.
- ☐ * \$25 covers the cost of gasoline for trips to interview camp refugees all over Lebanon.
- ☐ * \$50 rents a bus or hall for a workshop.
- ☐ * \$100 buys a tape recorder to assist in oral testimony collection.
- ☐ * \$250 covers expenses incurred whenever ARCPA holds a training workshop.
- ☐ * \$500 pays for a homepage on the Internet and periodic updating of it.
- ☐ * \$1000 pays for the technical services that transform an educational project undertaken by ARCPA into a pedagogical textbook available for world-wide distribution.

Membership:

- ☐ * Become a member of Friends of ARCPA by donating \$50 per year, and receive in return a year's subscription to *Al-Jana* (in Arabic or English), regular update reports, and an attractive calendar featuring artworks made by participants in ARCPA's workshops.

Name

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Thank you.



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